

ONTOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

# Post-Secularism, Realism and Utopia

Transcendence and immanence from  
Hegel to Bloch

Jolyon Agar



# Post-Secularism, Realism and Utopia

This book explores the contribution to recent developments in post-secularism, philosophical realism and utopianism made by key thinkers in the Hegelian tradition. It challenges dominant assumptions about what the relationship between religion and our so-called “secular age” should be that have sought to reduce or even eliminate religiosity from the public sphere. It draws upon utopian thinkers within the Hegelian tradition whose work has challenged this narrow secularism. In particular it explores the importance of philosophical transcendence to Hegelian and post-Hegelian religious, social and political theorising. This includes philosophers whose thinking is sympathetic or at least compatible with transcendence (such as Hegel, Taylor, Bhaskar and Bloch) but also those who have a reputation for rejecting transcendence and instead embracing immanence and even atheism (Feuerbach, Marx and Engels). By drawing on the utopian content of these thinkers it seeks to shed new light on the importance religious ideas have played in a range of philosophical positions within the broadly Hegelian tradition from theism, idealism, materialism and atheism to new ideas, especially new research on Hegel’s so-called “panentheism”. It will be of interest to those working in the areas of post-secularism and utopian studies. It should also be of interest to academics and students of the recent turn within Critical Realism to “meta-reality” and its implications for Hegelianism and Marxism.

**Jolyon Agar** teaches political theory at the Queen’s University of Belfast. He is the author of *Rethinking Marxism: From Kant and Hegel to Marx and Engels* (Routledge 2006).

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# **Post-Secularism, Realism and Utopia**

Transcendence and immanence from  
Hegel to Bloch

**Jolyon Agar**

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# Abbreviations

1M	First Moment
2E	Second Edge
3L	Third Level
4D	Fourth Domain
5A	Fifth Aspect
CI	Categorical Imperative
CM	Classical Modernism
CR	Critical Realism
DCR	Dialectical Critical Realism
DEN	Dialectical Ethical Naturalism
EC	Explanatory Critique
EN	Ethical Naturalism
HM	High Modernity
MELD	First Moment, Second Edge, Third Level, Fourth Dimension
MST	Mainline Secular Thesis
PDM	Philosophical Discourse of Modernity
PMR	Philosophy of MetaReality
PPMR	Post-Materialist MetaReality
SEPC	Synchronic Emergent Powers Consciousness
SEPM	Synchronic Emergent Powers Materialism
TDCR	Transcendental Dialectical Critical Realism
TIC	Transcendental Identification in Consciousness
TINA	There is No Alternative
TMSA	Transformational Model of Social Activity
TI	True Infinity
TR	Transcendental Realism

# **Introduction**

## **Post-secularism, utopia and reality**

### **Why we need metaphysics and transcendence**

The history of the radical Left in general and Marxism in particular is one characterised by a failure to appeal to any significant degree to those most in need of its message. The German philosopher Ernst Bloch, writing through most of the twentieth century, was painfully aware that even when capitalism is on its knees and the perceived injustices it inflicts on the greater number of people in society are most evident, it is the parties of the Right rather than Left that enjoy most popular support. Bloch observed this occurring in interwar Europe with horrific consequences for humanity. In 2013, the world is once again convulsed by economic catastrophe, this time caused by the financial incompetence and greed of Thatcherism and its various more recent reincarnations (such as Blairism and the Conservatism of David Cameron). The truths that Marx uncovered over 150 years ago regarding the inequities and intrinsic contradictions of capitalism are once again on the agenda for social scientists, economists and philosophers. His observation that there is an irresolvable tension between the need for capitalism to drive down wages in order to maximise profit and the crisis of overproduction that results from taking money out of consumers' pockets is supremely relevant to any serious analysis of the circumstances that led us to the financial meltdown of 2008. The neo-liberal solution to the crisis of the 1970s was to usher in the era of debt and credit capitalism. If ordinary consumers by the end of the decade could no longer afford to bask in the utopia of consumption (which had always been an illusion anyway) because their salaries could not stretch far enough, neo-liberals and neo-conservatives offered the salvation of easily available credit. The legacies of Reagan, Thatcher and Blair are today clear for all to see – a capitalist world economy on life support with millions thrown into the most horrendous states of poverty and hopelessness. This is the reality when economic decisions are made to massively expand the intrinsically unstable financial sector at the expense of the traditional industries that are the lifeblood of ordinary working people.

Marx was also correct when he demolished the arguments of those who insisted that capitalism was built on the foundations of liberty, fraternity and equality. In the era of welfare for bankers, one cannot help but feel a mixture of

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derision and indignation when one encounters the ludicrous pronouncements of neo-liberalism's contemporary exponents that "we are all in this together" and are somehow part of a "big society".<sup>1</sup> When the fabric of entire communities is rent asunder and the most vulnerable in society are attacked in the name of austerity, it is increasingly difficult to believe in capitalism's fairness. When we witness levels of welfare skyrocket in the aftermath of the financial crisis – but for bankers, rather than those who need and deserve it and who were blameless for the crisis in the first place – it makes a mockery of the neo-liberal principles of a non-interventionist state. Marx was right that there is no such thing as "the minimal state"<sup>2</sup> under capitalism. Its decision to "withdraw" from the economy is a political one, as much as its decision to intervene in order to prop up the elite, in whose interests it always has and always will serve.

One would have thought and hoped that in 2013, just as Bloch hoped when he wrote *Heritage of Our Times* in the early 1930s, that the Left could not fail to benefit from capitalism's economic, as well as moral, implosion. But now, as then, a depressing pattern is repeating itself. It is not the parties of the Left that are the beneficiaries of neo-liberalism's demise, but rather the parties of the Right and extreme Right. In continental Europe, the Far Right is again on the rise. Within the "Euro Zone", the countries suffering most from elite-driven austerity are suffering the additional and incalculable ignominy of the poison of Fascism. Witness the rise of the Golden Dawn in Greece. And outside the Euro Zone, the picture is also rather depressing. In the United Kingdom (UK), the racist British National Party (BNP) and English Defence League (EDL) and xenophobic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) are reaping the rewards of the failure of the British establishment to learn from its catastrophic mistakes over the past forty or so years. Bloch would be depressed, but considering the miserable history of the radical Left in the post-war period, he would surely not be surprised. There have been notable exceptions to this trend of disappointment. The radical Left played its part in the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) and welfare state. But in terms of posing a serious challenge to the structures of political and economic power, it is largely a history of failure and lethargy.

Marxism is sadly worthy of special criticism in this regard. Even during the best of times for the Left, it has been, at best, a peripheral force. Its devastatingly powerful attack on the weaknesses of capitalism deserves to be heard by the people most in need of liberation from the latter's most ravaging effects. But these are precisely the people most indifferent to its message. The fact that during the worst economic crisis in the history of world capitalism, political parties in the UK who pledged allegiance to Marxism remain an electoral irrelevance is a dreadful indictment on this movement. The track record of Marxist parties in the rest of the Western world is hardly much more encouraging. There are many possible reasons for this, but surely one of the most prescient is the legacy of what Bloch called the 'cold stream' (Bloch 1995: 1369) in whose icy waters Marxism has predominantly swam, as we will discuss in Chapter 6. As Bloch tells us in *The Principle of Hope* ([1959] 1995), Marxism consists of cold

stream and ‘warm stream’ (Bloch 1995: 1369) components. The former focuses on the painstaking and sober analysis of concrete reality while the latter embraces some of humankind’s most sublime imaginings of utopia which is intended to inspire and sustain revolutionary enthusiasm. Any successful revolution ‘is realized by the consciousness, the will, the passion, the imagination, of tens of millions of people’ (Bloch 1995: 1369). Any Marxism that chooses to swim only in the cooler waters neglects the human desire for meaning, depth and transcendence and instead prides itself on a clinical scientism that posits that all forms of human existence are exhausted by the working of natural laws, which can be scientifically understood. This type of Marxism has historically defended a kind of radical secularism that has sought to disparage and sideline the richest expressions of the search for depth meaning – utopia and religion. As I will argue, there are limits to how much Marx and Engels themselves can be held responsible for this. I point out that historical materialism is not necessarily a cold house for those who reject scientism and instead insist that human existence is not reducible to the operation of causal laws and principles. But that Marx and Engels represent progress beyond the clinical scientism and spiritually dead agenda of radical secularism is to damn them with faint praise. I argue that Marx and Engels have at least something in common with the likes of Rawls, Durkheim and Gauchet in this regard, if in little else – an attempt to identify the rational and social utility of utopia and transcendence once its metaphysical credibility has been shattered by the pitiless march of scientific epistemology.

To credit Marx and Engels with this vision of utopia and post-secularism – and there are plenty of commentators to whom even this minor concession would be anathema – is an important contribution to addressing at least one of the causes of Marxism’s political and electoral deficit. But I feel that this is not enough to immerse it in the warm stream that it so desperately needs. There is a need for metaReality and transcendence. This is why I believe that the philosophers that I explore in this book, who are either card-carrying Hegelians/post-Hegelians or who, I argue, have more than a little in common with Hegelian ideas – especially Roy Bhaskar, as well as Bloch (and there are others) – are such important thinkers. They explore the spiritual sources of the ethical content of the Left’s thinking that has historically been expressed using the language of narrow secularism and even scientism. I have argued that, in doing so, both take us beyond historical materialism, but this may say more about the deficiencies of this system of thought than their own logic.

The three key concepts I wish to explore in this book – post-secularism, utopia and realism – are huge presences in the Hegelian and post-Hegelian thinkers I shall be considering. That is the reason why I think these philosophers have such important things to contribute to contemporary discussions of all three concepts. The purpose of this introduction is to acquaint the reader in a (hopefully) painless way to all three. As post-secularism and realism are explored in some detail in later chapters, I will keep my discussion of them here brief. As there is no equivalent chapter on utopia, my introduction to it will be rather more detailed.

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### Definitions of “post-secularism”

Post-secularism, broadly defined, denotes dissatisfaction with what secularism has increasingly come to mean, both within the academy and wider society. Philosophers of the radical Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, such as David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche, have tended to view religion and other beliefs associated with transcendence as, in all probability, false in terms of their truth claims and even potentially dangerous to human well-being. Under increasing influence of this type of thinking, debates about religion and transcendence have been forced into a rather sterile “either-or” cul-de-sac: they are the persistence of irrational and even dangerous illusions. We can have the benefits of the secular age or we can have our moral, social and political consciousness informed by religion. Those opting for the first choice have increasingly come to positions of dominance. Religion and transcendence – especially in their traditional monotheistic form – are to be quarantined from infecting the political sphere, as evidenced, for example, in the writings of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. More recent manifestations of this can be found in the rise of so-called “new atheism”, although there is nothing new about the arguments of its main proponents. As we will see, this contemporary school of thought is simply reviving old radical Enlightenment ideas. This rather narrow and perfunctory definition of secularism has sadly seeped into the mainstream and is now almost an unspoken principle in much of the academy and wider society. Under its spell, we have seen the progressive marginalisation of religion from public life.

Post-secularists wish to challenge this definition. While they accept and defend the benefits that the secular age has brought us – such as human and democratic rights, tolerance of difference, pluralism, etc. – they question whether these benefits have to be at the expense of this quarantining. In fact, they offer a rather different definition of what the secular is supposed to mean. Rather than involving the eclipse of religious belief, post-secularists believe that it is more accurate to describe secularism in another way. To say that we have eclipsed the age of mono-religious states and societies from a few hundred years ago and are now in the secular age is not the same as saying that we have, or should have, entered the age of non-belief. There are many reasons why religious and transcendent beliefs are likely to remain and, in the case of some of the thinkers we will explore, even *should* remain.

This distinction between “likely” and “should” is important, because I wish to introduce two subdivisions into post-secularism. The former tends to involve a usually unacknowledged belief in the epistemological weakness of religious and transcendent metaphysical truth claims. That is, there is an agreement with the new atheists that science has effectively falsified metaphysical and transcendent beliefs systems. But this does not mean that such beliefs are to be dismissed as worthless or even dangerous. Rather, there is a preparedness to acknowledge aspects of them – for example, their moral value or social utility. I am going to define such a position as *immanent post-secularism*. Some of the most prominent philosophers, who – for varying reasons – do not find the metaphysical truth

claims of religion particularly persuasive but nevertheless wish to go beyond narrow secularism, belong to this grouping. I will consider two of them. First, I will briefly look at John Rawls' position in [Chapter 2](#), including why I find his arguments dissatisfying. I will also consider arguments from the Durkheimian tradition – both in [Chapter 2](#) and in more detail in [Chapter 3](#) in the form of Marcel Gauchet's Durkheimian-inspired analysis of the history of religion up to the present day. I argue that this general approach – that religion is sustained socio-politically – is too reductionistic to be plausible.

Within the Hegelian tradition, the later Ludwig Feuerbach would fall into the category of immanent post-secularism. As we will see in [Chapter 5](#), he is almost entirely famous amongst religious scholars and theologians for his magnum opus *The Essence of Christianity* (EOC), where he presents a humanistic-atheistic analysis of religious belief as the product of humanity's alienation from its own perfected image of itself. I argue that in the perfected image of humanity he presents, he embraces a form of atheistic transcendence. Once we address the causes of our alienation, then religion itself can be transcended. At this stage of this intellectual development, he qualifies as – what I, in a moment, will introduce as – a meta-post-secularist. As we will see, the reputation that this work has amongst theologians is not undeserved, but it has co-existed with an almost total neglect of everything that he wrote for the rest of his life. I think that some of his most fruitful contributions to atheistic analyses of religious faith are to be found in his later works where he abandons his transcendent humanism and reverts to a more straightforward naturalism. In *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* and *The Essence of Religion*, he presents religion as epistemologically inferior to science – a key feature of narrow secularism. As we will see, the paradox here is that this move away from transcendence encourages him to move towards a position where religion becomes more, rather than less, likely to be attractive to a great number of people. That is, there is a sense in which he finds reasons to doubt his humanist belief that religion can ever be fully dispensed with and is something which we will just have live with. At this stage of his life, he qualifies as an immanent post-secularist. So, too, are Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, as we will see in [Chapter 6](#). Indeed, I will argue that there is more agreement in their historical materialist attitude to religion and transcendence with the later than there is with the earlier Feuerbach.

Conversely, an acceptance of the rational truth content of transcendence is called *meta-post-secularism*. The obvious candidate from among the thinkers that I will be exploring in this book who falls into this category is G.W.F. Hegel. As I will argue in [Chapter 4](#), I am of the view that, not only are metaphysical questions about God strongly evident in his philosophy, they are foundational to all aspects of his system. I am disinclined to think it is possible to bracket off certain aspects of his objective idealism from his innovative and revolutionary thoughts about divine reality. In particular, I will argue that, in order to come to terms with his philosophy of history and political thought, we need to understand them as fundamentally *theological* enterprises. I am therefore not in the least convinced by atheistic interpretations of Hegel or even those thinkers (some of

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whom we will consider) who seem to think that his metaphysics of God are either outdated or can be dispensed with in the analysis of his political thought. Nor does that mean I am always at ease among those who do acknowledge the importance of theological matters to Hegel's system. Theologians who have taken an interest in his philosophy of religion overwhelmingly fall into two categories of interpretation – either Hegel was a theist or a pantheist. I argue that neither view is correct and that his great value as a meta-post-secularist lies in his *panentheism*. Along with pantheists and contra theists, panentheists contend that the material universe and all within it (including humankind) is part of divine reality. But along with theists and contra pantheists, they insist that this does not exhaust God – there is still divine mystery. I argue that this crucial theological distinction sheds vital new light on Hegelian political theory, especially its emancipative implications.

Another meta-post-secularist from the Hegelian tradition who thinks that some form of divine-idealistic reality is foundational that we will consider is Charles Taylor. But meta-post-secularism does not have to accept the existence of any extra-material dimension, as I have suggested. The humanist Feuerbach of the *Essence of Christianity* and the process metaphysics of Ernst Bloch would qualify on this criterion.

### Definitions of utopia

Indeed, it is vital to highlight the important distinction between religious and non-religious transcendence. It is possible to hold to a metaphysical position without associating it with any notion of a divine reality. The EOC Feuerbach and especially Bloch fall into the category of atheists who are also impressed by transcendence. As we will see, they are post-secularists because of the positive content of the religious tradition that they locate, despite their atheism. But they are meta-post-secularists, as I have said, because they think that this content is a misplaced (alienated) grasp of a perfected image of humanity that transcends the vicissitudes of our, frankly, rather wretched empirical human condition. In other words, they embrace what I am going to call *trans-humanism*. How do we make sense of meta-post-secularism that is founded on atheist principles? One possible answer is that trans-humanism is one feature of what is known as *utopianism*. At the risk of oversimplification, the utopian mindset disposes one not only to imagine qualitatively better forms of society than that currently in existence, but to passionately believe that they can be realised (Geoghegan 1987; Kumar 1987; Levitas 1990). Its origins lie in Thomas More's *Utopia* ([1516] 1965) where he conceived the term to describe visions of an alternative society, which is 'not only the best society in the world, but the only one that has any right to call itself a republic' (More [1516] 1965: 128).

Utopians often argue that such dreaming is inherent in human psychology (Geoghegan 1987: 2–3). Ernst Bloch, for example, thinks that this utopian impulse is an anthropological given that underpins and energises human life in almost all its aspects (politics, philosophy, art, religion, architecture, music, fairy

tales, dance, etc.). Nor does this impulse always have to be politically progressive. Bloch argues, for example, in *Heritage of Our Times* ([1935] 1991) that National Socialism was sustained by a deranged racialist utopian vision of Aryan supremacy. And the failure of the Soviet experiment has often been attributed to the degeneration of a utopian vision of communism into a dystopian totalitarian nightmare (Geoghegan 1987: 73–86). One only needs to recall the brilliant but horrifying vision in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ([1949] 1984). He portrays a dystopian world divided into three totalitarian super-states – Oceania, Eurasia and East-Asia – founded on the respective (but utterly indistinguishable on points of doctrine) socialist–utopian ideologies of IngSoc, neo-Bolshevism and Death Worship/Obliteration of the Self (Orwell [1949] 1984).<sup>3</sup> The linkage with socialism<sup>4</sup> is hard to miss, since all three super-states were, in Orwell's mind at the time of writing in 1948, already in existence in embryonic form or were realistic possibilities (Oceania: the result of the triumph of "English Socialism" (hence "IngSoc") in the United States and British Commonwealth; Eurasia: the extension of the Soviet empire to include all of continental Europe; East-Asia: the triumph of Maoist communism in China, Indo-China and the surrounding regions).

As we will see in some detail in Chapter 6, Bloch goes beyond merely identifying utopia with anthropology by positing a transcendent dimension of Hope – known as *ultimate utopia* – that underlies cultural (anthropological) utopia. In this sense, in his most important work *The Principle of Hope*, Hope is defined as a transcendent category. But even short of this exploration of "meta-hope", utopia is still future-oriented in the sense that it identifies essential prerequisites for human flourishing and provides the critical tools by which current states of human existence are deemed deficient and in need of restructuring. In an important sense, then, utopian wish-images are conceived in conditions of lack and unhappiness. It therefore operates with conceptions of what it takes for humans to be fulfilled beings, both individually and collectively, and then assesses to what extent current social, political and economic structures are able (or more usually unable) to satisfy these requirements. It is a necessarily *critical* social theory and has informed discourses that have sought to blame current social conditions (such as capitalism) for poverty, hunger, preventable disease and ecological degradation that would otherwise be eliminable.

When utopia is taken to the level of "meta-hope", as it often is with Bloch, we stray into the terrain of trans-humanism. This is where the link with meta-post-secularism and religious metaphysics is to be found. Bloch's utopianism is perhaps the most powerful example of atheism that is also very metaphysical. If we wish to understand the complexities of transcendent beliefs that deny the existence of a non-physical dimension of reality, then we need to factor into our discussion of post-secularism the importance of certain types of utopian thought. Atheistic transcendence is an important example of what I will call *meta-utopianism*.

Trans-humanism implies the existence of a completed state of human evolution – an end point towards which human (and often even wider natural) history

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is progressing. In this sense, it involves *teleology*. But one might immediately object that other belief systems involve teleological conceptions of humanity and nature that are hardly utopian. Controversial as it may seem, Darwinism seems to involve at least an element of teleology. Although almost every evolutionary biologist would balk at the very suggestion, it seems that the theory of natural selection includes what is known as *apparent teleology*. This can be seen in the observation that life forms have goals.<sup>5</sup> Teleology, strictly speaking, merely identifies purpose in something – for example, in the case of evolution by natural selection, the purpose or goal of living things is to adapt to their environment successfully and long enough to reproduce. Utopian teleology is something more. It locates *directionality* within purpose that has emancipative implications. There is a clear *end-point* towards which progression is possible or even inevitable. In the case of trans-humanism, it is a perfected image of the human condition.

One might, then, object that it is possible to understand teleology as directional, without having to endorse trans-humanism. This is, once again, perfectly true. This is the crucial distinction between meta-utopianism and what I am going to call *immanent utopianism*. The latter locates directionality within human history and even posits an emancipated form of future existence towards which we are at least capable of progressing. But immanent utopians do not think we need the help of metaphysics in order to do so. Indeed, some of the post-secularists we will look at are immanentists, rather than transcendentalists – Marx and Engels in particular. As we will see in Chapter 6, they reject *metaphysically informed* visions of humanity and its future trajectory, preferring instead to restrict emancipative discourse to concrete conditions, whereby humans meet physical and emotional life processes provided by nature. Their post-secular credentials lie in identifying the alienated wish-images contained in religious belief about how humanity can meet its nature-determined needs and desires. We can correct the pathologies of our empirical condition to create radically new and emancipative social arrangements that eliminate man-made structures of oppression, but we cannot transcend the fundamental laws of nature that make us human. This is the belief that the creative labouring human Subject as an emergent stratum of nature (and so operating within the constraints of nature's laws) is nevertheless equipped to satisfy not only ever increasing biological species needs, but also deliver universal social justice and freedom. Teleology is at work in this process, but it is restricted to identifying directionality and purpose of human species-being throughout history and society. While Marx and Engels may wish to tailor nature's laws for human benefit, they do not seek to go beyond them. To do so, in their estimation, is no more than idle folly. So just as they are immanent post-secularists, so they are also immanent utopians.

Conversely, meta-utopians have a belief in the ability of human beings to go beyond the constraints of natural species' needs and desires. There is the hope that we can somehow and in some sense transcend the parameters of the immediate species' life processes and embrace some kind of trans-humanism. Often this involves positing the historical quest for the satisfaction of these needs in

terms of a wider *non-human* cosmological process. This is not always the case, however. In *The Essence of Christianity*, for example, Feuerbach's conception of the infinite species-essence is trans-humanist, but remains thoroughly anthropological. For meta-utopians, then, teleological processes are not exhausted by the realisation of species' needs and desires. They are, rather, *infinite*. This can take the form of divine purpose, nature's own unfolding within which human history participates, and is often crucial or just a matter of confidence in our own ability as a species to invent qualitatively new forms of humanity. And so the satisfaction of material needs and their associated social and political ideals does not exhaust utopia. Thus, meta-utopianism can be idealist (the panentheism of Schelling and Hegel or the pantheism of the early Feuerbach), materialist (the Feuerbach of the *EOC* and Bloch) or without either commitment (Bhaskar).

On the other hand, to disbelieve in any sense of eschatology or social teleology puts one in the camp of non- or even anti-utopianism. This is a very specific criterion of when an ideology or philosophy cannot be seen as utopian. It is by no means endorsed by all critics of utopian thought. Perhaps the most vociferous anti-utopian contemporary thinker is John Gray. In his 2007 book *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, he argues that what unites any utopian belief from the Left or Right is the (in his view) delusory and usually dangerous confidence in the perfectibility of the human species.<sup>6</sup> Although I profoundly disagree with his strategy, his choice of criteria is very important to my endeavour to establish an association between meta-utopia and post-secular ideas that involve a defence of transcendence, because he insists that the ideal of realising (or manufacturing) an idealised conception of humanity is of Christian millenarian origins. This implies a concomitant belief in the idea of historical progress towards this final goal. Indeed, Gray argues that secular utopian projects to which the Enlightenment gave birth – which consist of Nazi scientific racialism, Communism and neo-conservatism/neo-liberalism – are but secularisations of the Christian idea of human progress. As he tells us in *Black Mass*: 'the utopian faith in a condition of future harmony is a Christian inheritance, and so is the modern idea of progress ... an idea of progress has been latent in Christianity from early times' (Gray 2007: 21).

In holding Christianity responsible for these beliefs, Gray seems to be making a clear association between utopia and infinite-teleologism and, thus, transcendence. In other words, he is not just saying that utopia envisages human progress. It also envisages progress towards *perfection*. This is, indeed, a secular utopian ideal that began its life in the womb of millenarian theism. But finite-teleologism is evidence that this definition rests on an incomplete understanding of what it means to be a utopian. Although Gray is never absolutely precise in what he means by human perfectibility, he seems to think it involves the belief that 'there is nothing to stop humans remaking themselves, and the world in which they live, as they please' (Gray 2007: 19). As we will see, this is a mark of infinite-teleologism and, as such, postulates our ability to transform ourselves from the sort of creatures that we have come to be, which nature has imposed. But it is not necessary to start with a transcendent conception of human nature in order to

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be sympathetic to utopianism. It is only the defining characteristic of meta-utopia. To this latter extent, Gray's exploration of the religious inheritance of certain secular utopian systems is well made. But his analysis cannot apply to *all* utopians. In particular, they are of little use when it comes to immanent utopians, such as Marx and Engels. Despite this, Gray sets them firmly within his sights when he says:

It is Marx's vision of the alternative to capitalism that is utopian.... Marx believed that with the arrival of communism the conflicts that had existed throughout history would cease, and society could be organised around a single conception of the good life.

(Gray 2007: 19)

Indeed, he did, but there is no evidence – beyond his earliest philosophical musings – that he ever embraced anything remotely resembling perfected humanity. As I argue in [Chapter 6](#), from the moment that he and Engels formulated their historical materialist theory, they abandoned such ideas and instead regarded humanity in ways remarkably similar to finite-teleologism, which would turn out to be compatible with that most unlikely of utopian sources – Darwinism. Marx is a powerful example of why Gray is mistaken in his simple equation of the idea of progress and teleology to Christian conceptions of perfection and redemption. As I contend, the historical materialist view of progress is perfectly compatible with the Christian notions of emancipation (especially in liberation theology), but that does not mean that Marxists must be committed to the idea of perfection and redemption as Christians would understand it. The extent of our utopian aspirations, Marx and Engels insist, is restricted to what I defined above and will do in greater detail later – the life process of the creative labouring Subject *as it has emerged in nature*. To envisage the end of class exploitation as the prerequisite for securing social justice is utopian in this sense only; it does not necessarily commit one to any idealised view of a transcendently transformed human condition emancipated from the laws of nature that limit and condition us. It can do, as we will see when we look at Bloch, but it has little in common with what Marx thought or so I will argue. Sadly, Gray is yet another example of a conservative commentator who uses “utopia” as a generic term with which to abuse Marx, without really getting to grips with what the actual relationship between historical materialism and utopian thought involves.

The Hegelian tradition is, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly utopian (at least, such are the key thinkers that I explore in this book), either immanent or transcendent. The notable exception is the later Feuerbach, who, as we will see in [Chapter 5](#), abandons Hegelianism altogether in his writings after *EOC* in order to qualify as such. But he does still qualify as an immanent post-secularist, because, as we will see, there is a kind of inevitability in his view of religion as reflection on external nature. Just as externality is permanent, so will be the religious inclination for a great number of people. One detects, as one does even more clearly with Gray, a grudging acceptance of the inescapability of faith and

transcendence. But unlike with Gray, whose post-secularism is purely motivated by a kind of conservative moral relativism, Feuerbach is keen to locate the rationalistic reasons for religion's existence. In this regard, he has more in common with Rawls than Gray, although, as we will see, his thoughts about religion in his old age are informed by naturalist–empiricist socialism.

## Realism and metaReality

The naturalism–empiricism of the mature Feuerbach brings us to the final major concept that I wish to explore in this book – the role of realism in Hegelian and post-Hegelian post-secularism and utopia. As with post-secularism, a more sustained engagement occurs in later chapters, so a brief introduction here will suffice.

Anti-utopianism is often also referred to simply as “realism”. Realist thinkers in this context warn against what they regard as the idle folly of utopian wish-images. Niccolo Machiavelli extols the virtues of divesting one's mind of such impracticalities in *The Prince* ([1513] 2012) (published three years before More's *Utopia*). This famous textbook of cynical realism aims ‘to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it’ (Machiavelli 2012: 63). Accordingly, ‘it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of the matter than the imagination of it; for many have imagined republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen’ (Machiavelli 2012: 63). Similarly, one of Gray's criteria for utopia is non-existence – in his case, the non-existence of non-violent human nature where our selfish and irreconcilable interests can be harmonised. Thus, utopia is anti-reality, because ‘[t]he pursuit of a condition of harmony defines utopian thought and discloses its basic unreality.... A project is utopian if there are no circumstances under which it can be realized’ (Gray 2007: 17, 20). But in this book, realism is not so empirically curtailed. Even immanent utopians and post-secularists, such as Marx and Engels, who in their rejection of metaphysics appreciate the importance of praxis, insist that analysis of concrete empirical conditions produces measured (i.e. “social scientifically informed”) postulations about the imagined future towards which human society is capable of progressing or so I will argue in [Chapter 6](#). And meta-utopians are still realists in the sense that they posit the existence or possible existence of a transcendent stratum of reality that underlies (Bhaskar) or goes beyond (Hegel, Bloch, Taylor) the empirical or actual. They are anti-empiricist or anti-positivist realists. In this sense, these meta-utopians and meta-post-secularists are *metaRealists*. Despite the often close association between meta-utopia and metaReality, it is nevertheless important to point out that there is no necessary connection. When he wrote *The Essence of Christianity*, for example, Feuerbach embraced trans-human principles, as we have seen. But he thought that anthropology exhausted these principles and so can hardly be said to endorse metaReality. We will explore this further in [Chapter 5](#).

The philosopher who has done the most in recent years to formulate a conception of metaReality is, of course, Roy Bhaskar. In [Chapter 1](#), I chart the trajectory of the evolution of his critical realism (CR). His thought develops

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from his earlier explorations of realist philosophy of social science and dialectics (which are closer to immanent utopianism) to his explicit endorsement of transcendence in his so-called “spiritual turn”. His philosophy is very important to this book, because, in many ways, his intellectual development contains both immanent and metaRealist positions, which can be seen in the key thinkers of the Hegelian tradition. We will see that at each stage of his depth realism, he seeks to uncover a “deeper” dimension to existence that extends (deepens) the scope of rationality and culminates in the positing of an ultimate “ground-state” that is the final vindication of transcendence. This is the evolution from immanent to meta depth realism.

The structure of the book is therefore as follows. In [Chapter 1](#), I trace the process of Bhaskar’s depth realism and argue that the metaReality books provide intriguing possibilities for the extension of rationality into the domain of transcendence. I also contend that even if we eschew transcendence, the summary of the pre-spiritual phases of CR as stages of “deepening” offered by these works has implications for immanent utopianism, particularly the scope for a naturalist ethics of human-being-in-nature.

In [Chapter 2](#), I explore how the philosophy of metaReality (PMR) and non-duality are effective tools in challenging some of the most powerful stalwarts of secularisation, especially new atheism. But it is also important in challenging representatives of immanent post-secularism (Rawls and Durkheim), whose positions on religion seem to rest on secularist presumptions or so I will argue. My critique will serve as a useful introduction to why I believe PMR should proceed in a non-dualistic (and broadly Hegelian) direction for both epistemological and ontological reasons. Bhaskar’s contribution is to be commended here. But I do identify some problems in his rendering of PMR, which I introduce. As we will see, his notion of spiritual self-enlightenment, where we return to our ground-state, encourages a strong voluntarism and even individualism, which seems to break sharply with the trajectories of the pre-spiritual works. I briefly introduce what I believe to be a possible corrective of these weaknesses that remains within a broadly PMR perspective – Bloch’s creative materialism. I argue that because his definition of the metaReal is futuristic (“not yet”) transformative collective praxis in the material world remains of central importance to the realisation of meta-utopia. Whereas Bhaskar posits a largely asymmetrical relationship of dependence between materiality and the base stratum, Bloch’s ontology of Hope involves a mutual interrelationship that is closer, in this respect, to an orthodox Hegelian position. Although unsuccessful in preserving a consistent Marxian orthodoxy, it represents a powerful case for the construction of what I am going to call a *post-materialist metaReality* (hereafter PMMR).

Intriguingly, PMR also questions some traditional defences of transcendence from the theistic traditions. Charles Taylor is an important meta-post-secularist who operates within monotheism. His post-secularism is informed by the belief that the religious condition is irreducible to epiphenomenal conditions, such as those posited by the Durkheimian tradition. In [Chapter 3](#), I explore his thought by comparing it to the reductionist analysis of Marcel Gauchet. Taylor rejects

Gauchet's hypothesis that the disenchantment and consequent narrowing of the rational self, characteristic of Cartesianism, was spawned by Christianity. But he does not reject disenchantment itself. Rather, he is dissatisfied with Gauchet's belief that it is a process driven by changes in state forms, which seems to discredit the argument for the rationality of transcendence. The debate between these two thinkers is important, because it helps us chart (and, with Taylor, critically analyse) the evolution of disenchantment through the history of philosophy to the ascension of Cartesianism and eventual eclipse of religion. Despite this posited trajectory, we will see that Gauchet is an important example of an immanent post-secularist, because he identifies a post-infrastructure function of religion that survives once state forms evolve to no longer require religious support. It is, however, still a reductionistic analysis, since Gauchet thinks it is the attempt by the self to resolve a crisis of meaning. It is simply a matter of replacing the instrumental social utility of infrastructural faith with the instrumental utility of resolving loss of meaning and epistemological certainty in the post-modern age. We will see Taylor reject this thesis with reference to the persistence of a genuine aspiration for transcendence evidenced in expressive individualism.

Our point of departure from duality and disenchantment is the German post-Enlightenment in general and Hegelianism in particular. The latter tradition posits the radical autonomy of the rational subject, whereby modernity's conception of the freedom of the self is combined with the judgemental rationality of transcendence. This has greatly influenced Taylor's analysis and critique of Cartesian thought. But he rejects Hegel's onto-theology, which, as I have stated above, I define as panentheistic. In Chapter 4, I make the case for why I think Hegelian panentheistic political theology is a powerful alternative to theism and duality. This is in stark contrast to Taylor's attempt to divest Hegel's political thought of its theological content in the name of a more traditional theistic grasp of God. If we are looking for a demonstration of why non-duality is epistemologically and ontologically preferable to duality and disenchantment, then we need look no further than Hegel. But I argue that not only is his political thought difficult to grasp without seeing it as an application of panentheistic principles to the social and political world, but that in doing so, we can mitigate some of the broader accusations levelled against Hegelians – namely, that there are oppressive anti-democratic implications to his thinking.

In Chapter 5, we explore some of the possible shortcomings of Hegelian panentheistic meta-utopian/meta-post-secular philosophy. I explore the evolution of Hegel's most powerful Left Hegelian critic – Feuerbach – from an initial pantheistic reading to his outright rejection of Hegelian philosophy in his later writings. Some of Feuerbach's analysis of idealism during the atheistic transcendence phase of his thought (*The Essence of Christianity*) is compelling and is relevant to some of the deficiencies I feel exist in idealist meta-post-secularism and idealist meta-utopia.

In Chapter 6, I explore the issues of transcendence and utopia in relation to the historical materialism of Marx and Engels. I argue that while it is perfectly

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possible to identify clear traces of utopia in their materialist application of the creative Subject, this is confined to an immanent and dualistic grasp of teleological purposes in man's relation to nature. Historical materialism operates squarely within a Darwinian–Marxist framework predicated on the later Feuerbachian principle of the permanence of nature's externality. Despite the fact that this represents a powerful critique of abstract and idealist Darwinism of the so-called new atheists (which I outline briefly), there is nevertheless no scope for metaReality and transcendence. I also explore efforts to develop their ideas in a meta-utopian direction in the transcendental materialism of Ernst Bloch. While I find his efforts to this end unconvincing, I argue that where he fails is as much a powerful exposure of some of the limitations of Marxism. In particular, Bloch impressively traces the meta-utopian content contained not only in wish-images of human consciousness of the present, but also in materiality itself. The result is an atheistic and materialist vision of metaReality that demands as much recognition and attention as Bhaskar's version.

This sets the scene for a concluding chapter, wherein I argue that one of the main reasons for the failure of the Left in general and Marxism in particular has been its tendency to eschew transcendence. I identify a core human yearning for meta-utopia – depth, spirituality and transcendent meaning – that Marxism has historically failed to appropriate. This is the reason why it has been the Far Right that has benefitted from crises in capitalism, rather than Marxism. To this end, I consider the merits of the Bloch's transcendental materialism/PMMR.

## Notes

- 1 This statement made by British Prime Minister David Cameron is, of course, a contradiction coming, as it does, from a man who is firmly wedded to the neo-liberal economic agenda that denies the very existence of society itself.
- 2 The idea of the “minimal” or “night-watchman” state originates in liberal social contractarianism where the only legitimate function of government was to act as arbiter of a hypothetical contract between private individuals. This was to enable them to pursue their economic self-interest free from the threat of “breaches” of the contract, such as violence, theft and fraud. Beyond interventions when contracts have been breached, the state has no right to interfere with the “free” transactions between citizens and should “withdraw” from the economic sphere as much as possible.
- 3 For an illuminating discussion of the utopian and dystopian significance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, see K. Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987).
- 4 This was despite Orwell's claim that he was a Socialist. He is attacking, rather, what he sees as the folly of grounding socialism in utopian thought.
- 5 For a discussion of apparent teleology in evolutionary biology, see Hanke (2004).
- 6 As he fully acknowledges, this definition of utopianism belongs to Isaiah Berlin. All forms of socialism, both revolutionary and reformist,

rest on three pillars of social optimism in the West ... that the central problems of men are, in the end, soluble; and that the solutions form a harmonious whole ... this is common ground to the many varieties of reformist and revolutionary optimism, from Bacon to Condorcet, from the Communist Manifesto to modern technocrats, anarchists and seekers after alternative societies.

(Berlin 1990: 211–212)

# 1 Re-enchanting reality

## Depth realism, ethical naturalism and transcendence

In this chapter, I trace the emergence of a depth realist and ethical–naturalist approach to transcendence in the philosophy of Roy Bhaskar – a system of thought that will be of considerable importance to my purposes of tracing the evolution of transcendence and utopia in the Hegelian tradition. First, depth realism involves the identification of rationally defensible levels of being in the world that the sciences and social sciences, in particular, have dismissed as either non-existent or outside the terrain of legitimate rational study. Each stage of development of critical realism (hereafter CR) has unearthed such a dimension to being and has thereby deepened and extended the subject matter of rationality. This process has come to a head in Bhaskar’s most recent writings – the so-called “spiritual turn” – in which he identifies a “deep” stratum of reality that demands that we break the taboo in talking about the link between rationality and transcendence. Second, I argue that this rational defence of transcendence is prefigured in an earlier (and still immanentist) stage of deepening, where Bhaskar utilises CR anti-positivist naturalism to reveal being as fundamentally value-laden and meaningful. Such a process is key to the later development of a non-dualistic ontology that is central to Bhaskar’s defence of transcendence and spirituality in the world. This provides the groundwork for the next chapter, where I discuss immanent and meta-post-secularism. In examining the latter, I consider the case for the defence of religious rationality that is predicated on non-dualistic deep transcendence. I believe it offers a more promising basis for political theories that wish to challenge narrow secularism.

As each of the many phases in the development of Bhaskar’s thinking is a contribution to the deepening process, it will therefore be instructive to present each one in terms of the deepening of reality that it represents. Although each stage in and of itself contributes massively to ontological deepening, two stages in particular are especially important – *dialectical critical realism* (hereafter DCR) and *transcendental dialectical critical realism/metaReality* (hereafter TDCR/MR) – because their deepening processes do not simply uncover new dimensions of reality hitherto unseen, but also demand that we rethink earlier stages of Bhaskar’s thought. As we will see, in developing DCR, Bhaskar invites us to reappraise his earlier work in terms of dialectics; in developing the spiritual turn, we are asked to rethink the entire CR enterprise in terms of an ontological

monist system, what Bhaskar calls *non-duality*. In this way, DCR and TDCR/MR undertake processes that do not simply deepen our grasp of reality. Rather, their deepening invites us to revolutionise our conception of reality, which has implications not just for the philosophies and worldviews that CR criticises and competes with (e.g. positivism, hermeneutics and post-modernism), but for CR itself. And in terms of meta-post-secularism, we will be especially interested in the TDCR/MR revolution. But in order to get to that point, we need to contextualise it as the outcome of the earlier deepening processes. It is to this task that we first must turn.

## Searching for Depth I: transcendental realism

CR is significant because of its attempt to re-vindicate ontology in the midst of philosophical systems that have either embraced a deficient conception of ontology or shied away from it completely. Much of Bhaskar's polemic in his early writings (especially *A Realist Theory of Science* ([1975] 1978), hereafter *RTS*) is directed against what he saw as empiricism's and positivism's tendency to equate what was posited as real with that which is empirically manifest – what is known as *empirical realism*. This is known as *transcendental realism* (hereafter *TR*), whereby a deeper level of reality is identified that is overlooked by empiricism. It is not hard to see how the latter is the classic case of an empirical realist position – that which is deemed to be real, at least tacitly, is that which can be described in terms of constant conjunctions of empirical events. As Bhaskar points out, every philosophy of science presupposes (whether it is prepared to admit it or not) a conception of reality as ordered so as to make knowledge of it possible – a schematic answer to the question of what the world must be like in order that we can know anything about it with any reliability (Bhaskar 1978: 28–29). This is known as the (at least implicit) acceptance of an *intransitive dimension* to reality that is independent of our knowledge and thoughts about it. The world is not just made up of our experiences of it, but also of events that persist independently of our direct experiences of them. Most empiricists are quite happy to admit this. So we have the level of the empirical, where we directly experience the world, and we have a second, deeper, level, where we acknowledge the independence of events from our experiences, which is known as the *actual* (Bhaskar 1978: 64–65). The point is that empiricists cannot evade accusations of empirical realism simply by incorporating the concept of intransitivity into their thinking. This is because Bhaskar thinks that the empirical regularities that are said to make up events that can be observed are not, in fact, features of the real world, but rather are an integral part of the scientific process of experimentation. That is, it is not enough to embrace the idea of an intransitive dimension. Whether or not any philosophy of science evades the error of empirical realism depends on what intransitivity is assumed to be made up of. The problem for empiricism is that in accordance with its “surface” view of reality (i.e. that it is made up of empirical regularities), anything that cannot be so described is dismissed as failing to meet the criteria of knowledge. Reality is

therefore reduced to being identical to scientific procedure. This is where Bhaskar comes in, because he thinks that the logic of scientific experiment involves a still deeper, third, *transfactual* level, whereby ‘an ontological distinction between (scientific) causal laws and patterns of events’ (Bhaskar 1978: 12; 1998: 10) is drawn.

If the reality that scientists are primarily interested in is not made up of empirical regularities, then what are they interested in? In short, it is the causal powers that things are said to possess, known as *generative mechanisms*, which when activated have an input into empirical outcomes. Scientists set up ‘artificial closures’ (experimental conditions) in order to isolate real generative mechanisms from others, with which they interact in Open Systems to bring about events. In this very important sense, scientists are ‘causal agents’ (Bhaskar 1978: 65), because it is they who are responsible for the precipitation of empirical regularities. Empirical regularities themselves cannot be said to carry any natural necessity (i.e. they do not prevail in Open Systems), precisely because they are a product of scientific closure. If scientific activity is to carry any importance in terms of our understanding of the world, scientists (or, rather, philosophers of science) must draw ontological distinctions between the subject matter of science and the events that they generate or, as Bhaskar argues, ‘a sequence of events can only function as a criterion for a law if the latter is ontologically irreducible to the former’ (Bhaskar 1978: 65). This is known as Bhaskar’s *transcendental realist* ontology, because it posits a depth realism of empirical, actual and real levels to the world (Collier 1994: 42–45).

CR philosopher Andrew Collier has shown that empirical realism involves the error of subjectivism. This occurs when epistemology ‘loses its reference to what ideas are about, and comes to be a matter of coherence between ideas’ (Collier 2003: 144), and, as a consequence, ‘the objects of ideas have dropped out of the picture altogether’ (Collier 2003: 144). Subjectivity is, therefore, the error of losing sight of the things about which truth claims are made. Ideas lose their “aboutness”. Empiricists fail to take sufficient account of the reality that our experience is always of something that is external to our experiencing it. Failure to acknowledge this *a priori* fact about experience means that we commit ‘the error of believing that experience is an object which we can inspect without reference to its objects – which makes subjectivism or idealism possible’ (Collier 2003: 138). The consequence of empiricistic subjectivism is the view of the world as made up of atomistic events. And so the world is *deontologised*. This whole process is what Bhaskar calls the epistemic fallacy (Bhaskar 1978: 16; 1993: 205). And insofar as we are reducing being to statements about being devised in human thought, the epistemic fallacy also takes the form of an *anthropic fallacy* (Bhaskar 1993: 205). Conversely, objectivity consists of reference ‘to what is true independently of any subject judging it to be’ (Collier 2003: 134).

## Searching for Depth II: critical naturalism

The objectivism that TR defends, in turn, is closely related to another key ontological category known as *emergence*. Empirical regularity is not a feature of Open Systems, because every event is the outcome of the interaction of various generative mechanisms. Open Systems are much too complicated and layered to give empiricistic prediction sufficient utility. What makes the multiplicity of generative mechanisms a feature of the world is its *stratification* (Collier 1994: 46). Emergence and stratification herald the further deepening of reality beyond TR in what is known as Bhaskar's *critical naturalism* (hereafter CN), which was most fully exposed in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (hereafter PN) ([1979] (1998)). According to CR, reality is made up of various layers or strata, ranging from the simplest arrangement of matter at the atomic and sub-atomic levels through to more complex arrangements of chemical and biological elements and up to complex social formations. Higher levels are emergent properties from lower levels, each with their own attendant generative mechanisms, which have causal powers to affect empirical outcomes. Bhaskar calls this *synchronic emergent powers materialism* (hereafter SEPM) (Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 97). And so SEPM is premised on a multilayered or stratified ontology in the natural and social worlds. This stratification is the result of processes of emergence where higher levels are emergent from those lower down (e.g. biological life forms are emergent from chemical processes, sociological from psychological, etc.). At the beginning of time, there were only the sub-atomic particles of the early universe, from which emerged, over billions of years, fairly simple and eventually more complex biological organisms. There then emerged from complex biological organisms even more complex sentient ones. From the biological, there thus emerged the psychological. And from the increasingly sophisticated psychologies of *human* organisms, there emerged, over a period of several million years, society and history. As Andrew Collier says:

It appears that the material universe existed before there was organic life, and that living organisms can only exist as composed of and surrounded by matter. In this sense, matter may be said to be more 'basic' than life; life in turn may be said to be more basic than rationality (in the sense that we are rational animals), and hence than human society and its history. This suggests that the sciences that explain a more basic level may have some explanatory primacy over those explaining a less basic layer. Laws of physics and chemistry may *in some sense* explain the laws of biology.

(Collier 1994: 46 [emphasis in original])

The "Powers Materialism" component of SEPM comes from Bhaskar's contention that each emergent stratum contains its own transfactual causal powers to effect empirical outcomes that are irreducible to the lower strata from which it emerged (Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 25). Collier has developed a useful way to make sense of SEPM by identifying two modes of causation at work within it

– horizontal and vertical (Collier 1989: 60). In horizontal explanations, the interaction of the different levels of being in the world (physical, chemical, biological, psychological, sociological, etc.) is assumed, each with causal mechanisms powerful enough to dramatically affect empirical outcomes. We can then make the claim that one stratum may be the dominant one in causing an event at a given time. But horizontal explanation by itself is insufficient, because if we were to leave it at that we would have no idea as to how it was possible for such interaction to occur. In vertical explanations, we investigate the conditions of the emergence of these mechanisms in the first place, which are prerequisites to their interaction at the horizontal level. This involves isolating each stratum to discover its generative mechanisms – a process that Bhaskar calls *diachronic explanatory reduction* (Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 98). SEPM requires this type of investigation, because each stratum has a crucial dependence for its existence on strata at lower ontic levels. A higher order level is based on the lower order level (e.g. cognition is emergent from the physio-chemical functioning of the brain) and acquires its generative mechanisms by virtue of its emergence from a lower order level, as we have just seen. Thus, vertical explanation is central to identifying generative mechanisms that codetermine events in horizontal explanation.

A key implication of CN that I have not discussed (although I summarise it in some detail elsewhere)<sup>1</sup> is the attribution of causal efficacy to agential intentions in CN's dualistic social world (duality of structural causation and intentionality) (even if these intentions are informed by erroneous ideologies). As irreducible emergent forms (existentially autonomous), a social agent's intentions and desires, as well as the social structures within which they are pursued, are granted causal efficacy. In this sense, our understanding of social being is deepened, because we see the intentions as epistemically interesting. Intentionality is a key ingredient in understanding how social structures come into existence, are sustained and demise. CN thus rejects the traditional dualities upon which positivism and hermeneutics (the giants of empirical realism in the social sciences) have been based – that of either reducing intentions to the status of epiphenomena of social structure (positivism) or social structure to the culturally determined sets of values and intentions of agents (hermeneutics). An alternative duality is presented, according to which the existential autonomy of strata is acknowledged. From this, Bhaskar produces the *transformational model of social activity* (TMSA), which asserts the primacy of social practices over intentional actions that reproduce or transform them (Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 34, 107–108). This involves a structural duality – the structure determines the character of the activities of the agents who occupy social roles within it, but is nevertheless subject to these activities for its reproduction and transformation. Social positions occupied by agents endure irrespective of the individuals who occupy them and so are not reducible to, but can only exist by virtue of, the individuals who occupy them (Collier 1994: 150). Conversely, we have the duality of praxis – conscious (desires and intentions) and unconscious (unintended consequences of acting on desires for the social structure) (Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 30).

### Searching for Depth III: explanatory critique

Dualities of structure and agency mean that part of the subject matter of the social sciences is the values of the individuals who participate in social life – consciousness has a real effect on the world. These values will often include erroneous ideas, in the sense that they are inconsistent with the function of the (usually oppressive) social structure within which they exist and sustain. Bhaskar does not just say that intentionality, cultural value and meaning, etc. are epistemically interesting in that we need to take them into account before we can understand what is happening in the social world, because this would not take him much beyond hermeneutics. He is also saying that consciousness may be incorrect or based on a delusional understanding of reality. So unlike most hermeneutical theorists, who have a tendency to insufficiently protect their thinking from collapsing into sociocultural relativism, Bhaskar is able to sustain the value-laden nature of the social world, while also embracing a fairly robust universalism and transculturalism. It is perfectly possible to hold to an incorrect/irrealist/delusional view of reality (e.g. fundamentalist Christian or Islamic). We know they are false, because it is possible to rationally identify normative values and needs that seem to exist independently of any particular judgement about them. But this does not mean that false ideas are not *real* in terms of their impact on the world. Religious fundamentalism, despite its patently false doctrinal content, has (sadly) very real causal *outcomes* in terms of its ability to produce social structures that frustrate or deny key human interests (Bhaskar 1986: 178; Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 63). An example of this could be the denial of gay or women's rights in Islamic societies or even the effect on these groups in conservative Christian communities, such as in Northern Ireland or parts of the United States. So we have to make a distinction between ideas that are irrealist, in the sense of failing to come even close to grasping the nature of things, and the very real effects that they can have. And one of the key effects that they can have is to sustain oppressive social structures, mostly because they are, in fact, emergent from them.

CN therefore involves *explanatory critique* (hereafter EC), whereby false consciousness and its associated social structures can be identified along with the concomitant frustration of essential human needs (known as *unfulfilled being*) that often result from an agent's immersion in such conditions. The main text that we are interested in here is Bhaskar's *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (hereafter SRHM) (1986).

This is precisely why CR generally is a powerful contributor to the wider theoretical tradition known as *critical theory* – where false consciousness and oppressive social institutions/cultural practices can be rationally evaluated from a non-empiricist/positivist position. A good example of this can be taken not from Bhaskar, but from Marx in his analysis of the wage-form. Here Marx identifies a necessary connection between the *facts* of a social category's functioning and the *values* held by an individual or social group engaged in it, which are necessary to sustain it (Agar 2006: 33). The false consciousness and alienation

that are necessary for the existence of social relations required by capitalism are exposed; ideas that are the means of keeping injustice concealed from those being exploited (Collier 1994: 184). This has massive implications for CR, because evaluative concepts such as fulfilment and justice (and their denial) can be seen as very real properties. The world is, therefore, irreducibly *value-laden* and *meaningful*.

The emancipative implications of EC are obviously considerable, in that revealing real material relations of false consciousness, exploitation and unfulfilled being should precipitate political action aimed at the transformation of the social structure concerned. Bhaskar accordingly stresses how important it is that emancipatory struggle should be grounded in the realm of practical concrete engagements with unjust social conditions. The centrality of a scientific analysis of such conditions is made clear by Bhaskar in *SRHM* when he says that ‘an emancipatory politics or practice is necessarily both grounded in scientific theory and revolutionary in objective and intent’ (Bhaskar 1986: 171). What Bhaskar is essentially proposing here is that philosophy must under-labour for the sciences, in the sense that it deduces the depth reality of the natural world as containing core realist categories (intransitivity, transfactuality, stratification, emergence, etc.) on the basis of an understanding of the current body of scientific knowledge. I referred to this process in *Rethinking Marxism* as weak *a priorism* and argued that the main strengths of Marx and Engels’ historical and dialectical materialism was that it adhered to these methodological principles. I argued that Bhaskar was such an important thinker in contributing to understanding Marx and Engels in this way, precisely because his CR was constructed out of these premises. He makes his case for weak *a priorism* pretty clear in *SRHM*:

On my conception, there can be no philosophy as such or in general, but only the philosophy of particular, historically determinate social forms ... philosophy neither subsists apart from the various sciences (and other social practices) nor contemplates a distinct, transcendent realm of its own. On the contrary, philosophy treats the self-same world as the science, but *transcendentally*, i.e. from the perspective of what such practices presuppose about the world... For in the long run philosophy must be consistent with the findings of science ... philosophy is dependent on the *form* of scientific practices, but irreducible to (although ultimately constrained by) the *content* of scientific beliefs.

(Bhaskar 1986: 12–13 [emphasis in original])

Clear transcendental (depth) materialism is at work here in Bhaskar’s understanding of how philosophy was to function. In rejecting a role for it that ‘contemplates a distinct, transcendent realm of its own’, Bhaskar is limiting its competence to the exact same realm of the sciences. Moreover, it is further constrained, in that it ‘must be consistent with the findings of science’ in the sense that it cannot legitimately speak about the world beyond drawing (transcendental) philosophical conclusions from what the sciences tell us. In this regard,

philosophy's job is to understand the ontological significance of what the sciences tell us, as well as to outline the rationality of the scientific process itself.

The immanentist credentials of EC concepts of true/false consciousness and fulfilled/unfulfilled being are clear at this stage of Bhaskar's intellectual development. Under the auspices of EC, philosophy acquires a crucial social and political role in teasing out the emancipatory implications of scientific discoveries. In *Rethinking Marxism*, I argued that EC is (or should be) grounded firmly within the scientific and materialist terms of CN and SEPM. Its evaluative concepts operate within the parameters of the latter's anti-positivist naturalism and materialism – a process that I refer to as *ethical naturalism* (hereafter EN).

#### **Searching for Depth IV: dialectical critical realism – towards dialectical ethical naturalism**

Bhaskar further develops the depth realist implications of CN/SEPM in the next stage in the development of his thought – his dialectical turn. By introducing a new, deeper (i.e. dialectical) dimension to reality, he must enrich and sharpen the previous stages of his system. That is, he dialecticises the key CR categories (i.e. DCR) of emergence, stratification and transformative human agency. Its key features are described in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993, hereafter *DPF*). In particular, in *Rethinking Marxism*, I drew attention to the role of SEPM in the dialecticisation of CR. The key CR concepts relating to SEPM are described as abstract, in the sense that they have been abstracted from their status as definite historical processes. They constitute what Bhaskar calls the *First Moment* (1M). That is, TR re-vindicates ontology and CN/EC deepens it, but they are hamstrung by treating these new categories of being abstractly. The explanatory power of SEPM reaches its potential once these categories are applied *dialectically*. In *DPF* and *Plato Etc.* (Bhaskar 1994, hereafter *PE*), Bhaskar develops the idea that we should not just regard categories of transfactuality, stratification, emergence and transformative praxis in abstract terms, but as products of definite historical processes. The former are properly scientific conceptions that have been abstracted from the process of historical change (Agar 2006: 39; Bhaskar 1993: 8). These purely abstract categories say nothing about the spatiotemporal processes of change that are affected as a consequence of their operations. CR, by virtue of its abstract treatment of things, considers only new, emergent material entities and structures (i.e. *positive existents*). The dialecticisation of CR involves the idea that positive existents contain, as a condition of their existence, *absences* or *negativities*, thereby introducing a fundamental *bipolarity of absence and presence* in them opening up to us a further – still deeper – dimension to reality, of which we were hitherto unaware. With DCR, we can therefore fully grasp, for example, slavery as constituted partly by it containing the presence of the absence of freedom. Its being (ontic status) depends upon it being the negation of freedom. Another example Bhaskar gives us in *DPF* is *alienation* – the presence of the absence of human fulfilment (Bhaskar 1993: 113) – thereby sharpening this key EC category.

Indeed, this has revolutionary implications for EC. First, it is the means through which social scientists can see how it is not enough to treat meaningful and evaluative concepts, such as slavery and alienation, abstractly. They are, rather, very real existences, because, as we have seen, they are the very driving forces of certain socio-economic systems (e.g. capitalism). They are, second, contradictory, because of their dependency on that which is their negation (e.g. slavery on freedom). Bhaskar accordingly describes all fundamental relations in such systems as heterological (Bhaskar 1993: 113). This can be seen in the Marxian concept of the ruling class. The emergence of such a dominant class and its associated false consciousness is both necessary to any hierarchical system and antithetical to it, because it necessarily generates subordinate classes where conditions of alienation and slavery prevail. Despite the capacity for these classes to also embrace false consciousness of their rulers, their immersion in conditions of ill-being generates alternative ideas designed to absent these conditions. The system generates classes that have vested interests in abolishing it. All classes (including the proletariat, who in absenting their ill-being will be abolishing themselves as a class, according to Marx) are therefore *internally contradictory* (Agar 2006: 43–44; Bhaskar 1993: 56).

In this, the emergence of new strata and their attendant causal mechanisms is to be understood as a process of *determinate negation* or the absenting of absences described as a ‘tensed process in space-time’, which Bhaskar calls *Second Edge* (hereafter 2E) spatiotemporalities or *rhythmics* (Bhaskar 1993: 52). We must consider emergent strata as rhythmics, because each stratum is actively engaged in relations with other emergent phenomena at, what we have seen Andrew Collier describe as, the level of horizontal causation; indeed, the process of their emergence itself is due to this rhythmical interaction. In our example of slavery, in order for us to understand how it came to be, we need to understand it as the outcome of socio-historical processes, whereby freedom became negated/absented. In this way, 2E represents the level of transformative absences or, in Bhaskar’s own words, the linkage of ‘1M causally efficacious determination to 2E transformative negation’ (Bhaskar 1993: 52).

The terrain of this process of interactive emergence is known as *Third Level* (hereafter 3L) internal dialectical relations or dialectical *totalities* (Bhaskar 1993: 58; Bhaskar 1994: 86). The constituent parts of this totality are, of course, causally efficacious, in accordance with the principles of SEPM. The totality at 3L is the domain of interacting strata in the known material universe, wherein causal mechanisms of the physical and chemical universe interacted with those of the biosphere and society. It is the basis and concrete contextualisation of the dialecticisation of TMSA in alienating and oppressive social conditions, whereby unfulfilled being was grasped as the failure to realise species material potential. Structural and ideological causes of ill-being are obviously interactive spatio-temporal processes that generate alienation, oppression and the like. But they also cause transformative and emancipative agential action directed towards their negation. Here we have the DCR idea of an internal causal relationship between geo-historical causal powers (rhythmics) or what Bhaskar calls ‘entity

relationism' (Bhaskar 1993: 125). These internal relations are of existential pre-supposition – i.e. each rhythmic is constituted in terms of its relations with other rhythmites. These internal relations are called dialectical connections, which establish 'systems of internally related elements or aspects' (Bhaskar 1994: 75).

Importantly, these connections are not *necessarily* contradictory – dialectical contradictions such as those which generate and are energised by such conditions of alienation or slavery are, rather, a *species* of dialectical connections. Indeed, as Bhaskar says: 'by no means all dialectics depend upon contradiction' (Bhaskar 1993: 56). Totalities which establish entity relationism need only be governed by existentially constitutive relations of intra-relation among emergent spatiotemporalities (Agar 2006: 49), including 'existential constitution ... permeation (presence within) ... or just connection (causal efficacy)' (Bhaskar 1993: 58; 1994: 75–76).<sup>2</sup> In other words, 3L totality is a holistic causality that, as such, is made up of dialectical connections. Marx's idea of labour as a necessarily socialised process, whereby labourers interact with nature, each other and their own species, is an example of a dialectical connection. It is only when these connections 'are typically ... radically negational...' (Bhaskar 1994: 86) that holistic causality becomes contradictory. So in the case of labour, socialised labour is the material terrain within which fulfilled human beings flourish. Conversely, socialisation degenerates into conditions of alienation, egoism and individualism when the wage-form becomes parasitic upon it. As we will see when we explore Bhaskar's reclassification of the subject matter of DCR in terms of demi-reality, this distinction will be important. (I will take it that dialectical contradictions are more constitutive of our current material existences (with the strife and conflicts that dominate it), while our deeper "spiritual" relations with each other and the universe in general correspond to dialectical connections that are not antagonistic or divisive.)

It is, then, by virtue of dialectical connections that emergent spatiotemporal strata and their causal mechanisms intra-act in a holistic causality (Bhaskar 1994: 77). As Bhaskar tells us in *DPF*: 'I will argue, when I come to totality and holistic causality, that emergent social things are existentially constituted by or contain their relations, interconnections and interdependencies with other social (and natural) things' (Bhaskar 1993: 54). And later in the text:

[t]o grasp totality ... is to see things existentially constituted and permeated, by their relations with others; and to see our ordinary notion of identity as an abstraction not only from their existentially constitutive processes of formation (geo-histories), but also from their existentially constitutive interactivity (internal relatedness).

(Bhaskar 1993: 125)

If my reading of Bhaskar is correct, despite the fact that totality is defined in terms of dialectical connections, it seems that the life-force of the dialectic – certainly in our everyday material existence – is dominated by rhythmites engaged in dialectical contradictory relations. This is the context in which spatiotemporal

emergence occurs. Bhaskar refers to this as *detotalisation* – the false consciousness, alienations, splits, anomalies and contradictions within internally related objects. In other words, 3L detotalisation provides the impetus for 2E transformative negation or the absenting of detectable absences (e.g. in Marxism, the absence of appropriate relations of production and superstructural forms in conditions where new technologies demand it). So, detotalisation occurs when rhythmnics enter into heterological relations with each other. Conversely, ‘totality seeks to exclude heterology and to embrace all in a unity (albeit of differentiated aspects)’ (Bhaskar 1993: 121). Rhythmnics therefore must have a propensity to change and become negated if temporal processes of development and change are to be possible. They must therefore be *existentially contradictory* (Bhaskar 1993: 57), implying the intrinsic finitude of all (material) things. In *DPF*, Bhaskar cites a key example of existential contradiction in the master-slave relation, which is ‘poles of ... antagonistic dialectical contradictions, exemplified by the famous contradictions between capitalist and worker’ (Bhaskar 1993: 60).

In all of this, we are invited to regard 3L totalisation as the process where new philosophical accounts of reason are formed, such as, in accordance with EC, the formulation of anti-slavery ideas in light of scientific study of social pathologies. Emancipative social science therefore becomes equipped with concepts of unfulfilled being – a process which, thus, is ‘at once the inner truth or pulse of things’ (Bhaskar 1993: 9). But Bhaskar immediately stresses the importance of the *Fourth Domain* (hereafter 4D) of DCR, which refers to the centrality of human transformative praxis: ‘[a] fourth dimension (4D) is required – for the CR totality is radically open ... we must return to practice’ (Bhaskar 1993: 53). What this involves is the dialecticisation of TMSA or, as Bhaskar tells us, ‘the mechanism at the core of critical naturalism ... TMSA, is a model of transformative praxis, *absenting* the given’ (Bhaskar 1993: 152–153). Thus, transformative praxis is designed to overcome detotalised conditions by absenting crucial absences that are constraints on the realisation of species potential. In short, ontic change in the world is dependent on human agency. The CN dualities of structure and agency of the TMSA are crucial here, because it is the terrain in which social agents are, on the one hand, constrained to operate within repressive structural conditions (and may even endorse the false doctrines that justify them) and are able to undertake transformative praxis to absent them on the other (Bhaskar 1993: 153, 156–157). But Bhaskar is talking not only about ontic, but also about epistemic change, since ‘epistemic change must be possible and necessary too’ (Bhaskar 1993: 44). It is clear that 4D therefore involves the essential unity and interdependence of theory and practice. It seemed to me in *Rethinking Marxism* that this pointed towards something akin to the Marxist process of intra-active socialised labour. This is grounded in what Bhaskar called *four-planar social being* (Bhaskar 1993: 160), consisting of (1) material transactions with nature; (2) interpersonal intra- or inter-action; (3) social relations; and (4) intra-subjectivity (Bhaskar 1993: 153). I pointed out that the interpersonal relations here (both power<sup>1</sup> relations of absenting agency and power<sup>2</sup> relations

where agents protect repressive social structures) closely resembled the early Marx's humanist concept of expressive forms of labour, free from relations of domination and alienation, that is the condition of possibility of the eudemonistic (i.e. emancipated) society, the converse of which is ideologically legitimised relations of alienation and repression under capitalism (Agar 2006: 55).

I noted how Bhaskar's DCR analysis of the emancipating potential of absenting transformative praxis drew on the EC idea of objectively identifiable morality of human labour relations and the reality of humanity's alienation from its species-being under capitalism. However, four-planar social being demands that key EC terms are dialecticised. With DCR, Bhaskar formulates what I am going to call *dialectical ethical naturalism* (hereafter DEN), when core EN categories of species-being/unfulfilled species-being and true/false consciousness are grasped as spatiotemporalities inhering in socialised labour conditions of totality/detotalisation. DEN accordingly transforms social science into what Bhaskar regards as an *axiology of freedom* (Bhaskar 1994: 110) in recognition of its contribution to the absenting of ill-being. As we have seen, this is where social scientists are crucial to the development of emancipative transformative praxis. And as we will see in [Chapter 6](#), once dialecticised and historicised, Marx and Engels, strictly speaking, transform their Feuerbachian conception of "species-being" into a more robust immanentist conception of species' needs of the material life process. That is, we will see that Feuerbach's idea of human species-being in his *Essence of Christianity* occurs within a philosophical framework that rejects the idea of an extra-human transcendent realm of consciousness, but nevertheless seems to involve a kind of trans-humanism, where the species is defined as having infinite developmental potential. It will not be until his later writings and Marx and Engels' historical materialism that the concept is reformulated in accordance with an more consistent immanence that dispenses with notions of trans-humanism.

In summary, thus, the dialecticisation of CR categories is revolutionary, both for our understanding of depth realism, but also for the previous stages of CR itself. We have the re-vindication of TR at 1M and the introduction of real absences in CN at 2E. But with 3L concepts of internality, entity relationism, intra-action, holistic causality and the like, we have the deepening of the EC/EN into DEN. In accordance with the principle of intra-relationality, each element of a totality is existentially constituted by its intra-relationality. In this sense, it is a relation, rather than simply a discreet object, which may be, at best, related to other objects externally. Marx's definitions of key social concepts and categories are once again instructive. Capital, labour, value, commodity, etc. are all grasped relationally, in the sense that the relations in which they enter into with each other is not some contingent fact about them, but is part of their very being. In this way, 3L totality is the means whereby we can come to understand things as *ontological relations*. As Bhaskar argues in *DPF*:

[t]o grasp totality is to break with our ordinary notions of identity, causality, space and time.... It is to see things *existentially constituted*, and permeated,

*by their relations with others; and so see our ordinary notion of identity as an abstraction ...*

(Bhaskar 1993: 125 [emphasis in original])

Each individual component is, therefore, in itself merely an abstract expression of a concrete dialectical whole.<sup>3</sup> Bhaskar's DCR concept of *taxonomic realism* is useful here. It is the contention that phenomena such as a person's identity are an internal causal relationship between many rhythmicities. As much as any other social relation, a person's identity and beliefs (true or false) have emergent status and causal powers by virtue of their immersion in intra-acting totalised conditions. In addition, the dialecticisation of EC is important to the development of the concept of unfulfilled being, because constraints on, for example, the realisation of human creative species' powers are now to be understood as real concrete absences. For example, the wage-form in capitalism contributes to the perpetuation of the real absence of non-alienatory labour conditions. And at 4D, we have the centrality of agentive transformative praxis in the elimination of material conditions of oppression and the realisation of eudemonia.

### **Searching for Depth V: non-duality – transcendental dialectical critical realism/philosophy of metaReality**

By identifying DCR with Marx in this way, we are attributing to DEN a clear materialist and immanentist basis. The value-ladenness and meaningfulness of human existence is uncovered by robust scientific theories about the world such as historical materialism enriched perhaps by Darwinian evolutionism.<sup>4</sup> However, with Bhaskar's next major work *From East to West* (2000) (hereafter *FEW*), it appeared that he wished to distance his system from such associations with materialism. In short, with what became known as yet another attempt to find a still deeper dimension to reality, he radically reclassified totality as intra-acting strata *emergent from God*. This became known as *transcendental dialectical critical realism* (hereafter TDCR) or more popularly referred to as the first major part of his "spiritual turn". This latter description reflected Bhaskar's identification of this deeper stratum as the ultimate or base level of reality that was non-material, which he provisionally entitled simply "God". He tells us that 'God is truly the cement of the universe, binding it together with the unifying power of love, in holistic and heterocosmic causality' (Bhaskar 2000: 44). God is therefore 'the ultimate categorical structure of the world, including human beings, which are essentially but not only Godly (or Godlike)' (Bhaskar 2000: 33). Bhaskar adheres to a conception of God as infinite and unbounded (Bhaskar 2000: 45). It is only by realising that we are an emergent and intra-acting part of this totality that humanity can overcome conditions of unfulfilled being. In this way, it seems that Bhaskar wants to develop (or deepen) the DCR concept of dialectical connection in the sense that everything (and everyone) is existentially constituted by a profoundly "godlike" base stratum – a kind of godly holistic causality. Accordingly, 1M–4D dialectical processes of emancipation are now

dependent on a *spiritual enlightenment* where we become conscious that we are, in essence, “godlike”. Far from human essence being exhausted by our material species (four-planar social) being, which is seemingly cursed by conditions of dialectical contradiction, ‘[i]n our first, most essential reality, we are immortal and at one with God’ (Bhaskar 2000: 76).

Bhaskar is careful, however, not to identify God too closely with humanity:

God ... is ontologically ingredient in but not *saturated* by man (four-planar social being, nature, the cosmos). As ingredient in man, God is *ontologically immanent* – this is the God *within* (or inside) man, the ‘inner God’. As unsaturated by man, God is ontologically transcendent – this is the God *without*.... As ontologically ingredient in, God is not *exhaustive* of (i.e. does not exhaust the being of) man or four-planar social being. The latter is, rather, overlain by layers of *maya* (illusion), which occlude, dislocate and distort it.

(Bhaskar 2000: 41 [emphasis in original])

As we will see in a moment (and in more detail in [Chapter 4](#)), this concept of God as both ontologically immanent and transcendent has remarkable similarities with panentheism. This is a monistic metaphysic, which posits all matter (including, and in particular, humanity) as “in God” and yet not exhaustive of Him. As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), Hegelian panentheism makes the contentious claim that material reality – including human selfhood – does not contain full reality-in-itself and is, as such, dependent upon an ideal (divine) dimension to existence that contains but also transcends it. This is rather similar to the key concept of TDCR, which acts to further deepen CR – *demi-reality*. Man is “Godly”, but there co-exists aspects of his existence that are illusory but nevertheless real in the sense of having real causal effects. This is in accordance with EC principles, but the alienation caused by false consciousness is now grasped in TDCR terms in the sense that ‘they are ultimately to be explained in terms of the real (causally efficacious) – irrealist (in character) – demi-real (false but dependent) – categorical structure of social reality’ (Bhaskar 2000: 38). Accordingly, acting to absent the constraints on the realisation of our true essence is to act to realise our godlike essence of unconditional love. As Bhaskar argues: ‘the dialectics of de-alienation (of re-totalisation) are essentially dialectics of love.... The essence of liberated man is therefore love of God’ (Bhaskar 2000: 44). Liberation and realisation of our species-essence thus is not so much the realisation of our material species’ needs and the absenting of constraints on this embodied material essence that a materialist reading of phases I–IV might suggest. Rather, liberation depends on unconditional and selfless love and the realisation of species-essence is that of a transcendental self.

It seems to me that this is, indeed, a radical re-orientation of the CR approach to DEN. Rather than understanding social ills in terms of the absenting of embodied material species’ needs, it depends on diagnosing ‘the absenting of the presence of the deep, ultimate, actual but occluded, categorical structure of the

world: God, unity and love' (Bhaskar 2000: 39). Our purpose is therefore not to realise and absent structurally grounded constraints on our material species-essence, but to realise our godlike essence – our intrinsic nature is to realise God (Bhaskar 2000: 44). DEN and DCR transformative praxis continue to play a key diagnostic role in uncovering the causes of unfulfilled being and proposals for their resolution. But under the terms of this identification of God as the foundational generative mechanism of all reality and human agents as "godly", the efficacy of DEN relies on a purely *agentive* mechanism of transformative emancipatory practice or, as Bhaskar calls it, 'transformed transformative practice' (Bhaskar 2000: 39 [emphasis in original]). That is, while the importance of absenting constraints on human freedom and self-realisation via dialectical enlightenment is retained from DCR, Bhaskar's sense of what the human essence is that is to be liberated is now unambiguously stated. If there was any doubt before about Bhaskar's position on what constituted the base stratum of reality, there could be none in *FEW*. It is not our materially situated species (four-planar social) being, but rather our transcendental self that is freed (Bhaskar 2000: 37). Indeed, collective realisation of the human essence on the terrain of four-planar social being is dependent upon the desire of the individual for self-realisation – i.e. freedom from demi-real relations. This seems to reduce emancipative action to individual practices, such as prayer, meditation and self-reflection. The more in touch we are with our transcendental selves via these practices, the more we embody this spiritual essence in our everyday concrete lives kindling within us compassion and solidarity 'involving collective and totalising activity ... the project of universal self-realisation' (Bhaskar 2000: 152).

The best way to grasp Bhaskar's thinking here is to understand it as the formulation of non-dualistic ontology and the resultant need to rethink what is required in terms of both DEN and transformative emancipative practice. While this way of looking at reality is a core feature of *FEW*, it was only with the publication of the so-called "metaReality books" – *Reflections on Meta-Reality* (2002a) (hereafter *RMR*), *Philosophy of Meta-Reality* (2002b) (hereafter *MR*) and *From Science to Emancipation* (2002c) (hereafter *FSE*) – that the new ontological monism was fully clarified and sharpened. Non-duality stands in contrast to demi-reality (of *relative* being) as the ontological domain of truth and goodness (of *Absolute* Being) (Bhaskar 2002b: 181). The former was – being both concrete and embodied – the domain which CR/DCR concerned itself with, but now Bhaskar thinks that it is incomplete, because of the existence of an *additional* transcendental dimension beyond TR. In other words, we have seen how the transcendental philosophy of science of the Kantian variety has been foundational to CR, but that it was restricted to materiality or so I have argued at length that it must be (Agar 2006). With the spiritual turn, Bhaskar is applying the transcendental method to a much wider sense of reality, to a dimension that is beyond the material, beyond history and culture (Dean *et al.* 2005: 13) and is foundational to them and of which they are an intrinsic part. This wider sense of reality is known as metaReality. The spiritual turn is therefore also referred to as the *philosophy of metaReality* (PMR). As Bhaskar tells us:

‘meta’ here connotes both the idea of transcendence, that is going to a level beyond or behind, or behind and between reality, while at the same time the ‘reality’ in the title makes it clear that this level is still real and so part of the very same totality that critical realism has been describing all along.

(Bhaskar 2002a: 175, fn. 8)

It therefore follows that concepts that have been important to the emancipatory discourse of CR/DCR are restated here, such as the DCR concept of master-slave and power<sup>2</sup> relations, which, as we have seen, involve pathologies of the individual, including social relations of exploitation, oppression, instrumentalism, etc. and individual feelings of selfishness, egoism, isolation, alienation, unhappiness, etc. But to grasp them materially, as it were, is to fail to understand them as dualisms that need to be overcome. That is, CR/DCR approaches have accounted for these pathologies in terms of an incomplete (demi-real) understanding of the human essence, a limitation that actually functions to sustain these oppressive and unhappy conditions. Moreover, it is the metaReal form of the human essence that is the condition of possibility of demi-reality, a foundational base stratum of reality upon which the demi-real is parasitic.

It seems to me that this is the spiritualistic development of the DCR categories of dialectical connection and dialectical contradiction. We saw above that the latter were a species of the former. Through the deepening lens of PMR, this emergence is stated in terms of the parasitic dependence of dialectical contradiction on dialectical connection – a deeper and more fundamental level of holistic causation and entity relationism. In an important sense, metaReality is the domain of non-contradictory entity relationism and dialectical contradictory relations – which were the main focus of DCR – and are now thought of in terms of relative being (demi-reality). Ultimately, his spiritualisation of CR/DCR aims at encouraging human beings to live “non-dualistically”, where we look beyond the sensuousness of direct embodied experience of four-planar social being and reconnect with our godlike essence. The latter makes up a *ground-state* of core humanity. He invokes the emergentism of his earlier work by positing demi-reality, wherein the human material-social condition is restricted to an emergent stratum of delusional states of mind that can (and do) give rise to alienation and oppression. That is:

...in his [Bhaskar's] meta-realist phase he is addressing the unhappy, desirous soul, his expectation being that, through a reminder of the truth of human meta-reality, individuals will be energised to think their way back to a reconnection with this true essence, the nature of which is conveyed by the notion of the ‘ground-state’. In introducing the concept of the ground-state Bhaskar is invoking the earlier theory of stratified reality: of a human reality, beneath embodiment and perception, beyond society and history.

(Dean *et al.* 2005: 13–14)

The demi-real human is parasitic upon the deeper transcendental human essence of unconditional love and godlikeness – the ground-state – which is itself an

emergent stratum from a wider cosmic spiritual whole of universal love (Bhaskar 2002a: 190–229). PMR demands that we grasp human being non-dualistically or as Jamie Morgan puts it: ‘Bhaskar begins from the argument that humans are capable of non-dual states or transcendental identification with their environment’ (Morgan 2005: 135). There is therefore a clear liberating potential in the metaReal that can be realised only when we acknowledge the delusional status of a purely demi-real understanding of humanity. By transcending demi-reality, a new emergent mode of existence is produced (Bhaskar 2002b: 197). But it is a transcendence that is not so much a going beyond demi-reality as a ‘retotalisation’ of CR emancipatory ethics at this new ‘higher’ level (Bhaskar 2002b: xv).

The implications for Bhaskar’s pre-TDCR/PMR phases in all of this are significant, because prior to *FEW*, CR philosophy was restricted to what he now describes in terms of relative being/demi-reality (Bhaskar 2002b: vii). This is the terrain I will suggest when we look at the transformative (non-dualistic) materialism of the labouring Subject (where human beings are grasped as socialised labouring emergent beings of nature in accordance with four-planar social being). This is grasped immanently – e.g. in terms of the Darwinian–Marxian dialectic that I will discuss in Chapter 6. The human essence must therefore be exhausted by these material–social characteristics. This will be the ontological context within which I will explore key DEN categories that can be given immanent utopian application. I will also explain why I believe this application is not sufficient and that there is reason to posit a transcendent dimension or stratum to reality. By the logic of Bhaskar’s new spiritual retotalisation, the experiences associated with material embodied existences are indicative of a more fundamental and transcendent form of existence. For Bhaskar, evidence that we are not only capable of but actively engage with this non-dual state can be located in a whole series of everyday events. The only difference is that we tend to view these events dualistically from the position of an egoistic ‘I’ (Bhaskar 2002b: 37), which is evidence of the prevalence of the Cartesian dualism not only in academic philosophy, but in our “common sense” engagement with the world around us. We take mundane activities such as watching television, reading, cooking a meal, playing sports or musical instruments as simply the discrete elements of the material universe interacting with each other to form a basic element of *identity*. Under the terms of PMR however, this is, as Morgan says, ‘an indication of the rhythms of a fundamental inter-penetration of being that is the basic condition of the possibility of that identity’ (Morgan 2003: 125).

This is how we can understand the demi-real domain of this identity as a parasitic emergent aspect of a deeper transcendent and spiritual unity. In this sense, I am sympathetic with Bhaskar’s claim to have established continuity between CR/DCR and TDCR/PMR. Recall above that I described dialectical contradictions such as the wage-form as emergent from, and parasitic upon, deeper dialectical connections of harmonised four-planar social being. From Bhaskar’s point of view, PMR simply renders explicit what was already strongly implied in DCR – a non-materialist interpretation of the dependency of detotalising

contradictory social relations of ill-being on deeper socialised conditions of harmony and human fulfilment.

Indeed, the dynamic of 4D emancipatory discourse and activity is radically reconceptualised with significant implications for four-planar social being. Basically, what, previously, I (and others) took to be the materialist core of transformative emancipatory praxis is jettisoned. When an individual becomes aware of the deeper unity, he or she achieves enlightenment of his or her true essence and is, as such, capable of transformative praxis towards the realisation of a society of genuine human flourishing and emancipation. Rather than human capacities and powers being exhausted by their dialectical immersion in the natural, historical and social condition of our material embodiment, they are now to be seen in fundamentally *extra-social* terms. The pathologies of dialectical contradictions (demi-reality) are seen not as rooted in specific material socio-economic-cultural systems, but in failures residing at the level of our consciousness, albeit historically situated. This is what Bhaskar would call “thinking dualistically”. The grounding of transformative praxis characteristic of TMSA in SEPM is effectively replaced by a transcendental understanding of freedom. As Dean *et al.* state:

For once we move to a transcendental universal notion of freedom as the absenting of constraints inherent in all human activity, then we move from a structural analysis of social relations implicit in the transformational model of social activity to a more transcendental approach to human freedom. The pulse of freedom now manifests itself as a dialectic of self-realisation – and God-realisation – where self-centred subjects flourish in selfless solidarity.

For the Bhaskar of meta-reality, the issue is not to engage in a study of society, but to develop an awareness that in becoming aware that the alienated world in fact depends upon free, loving, creative, intelligent energy and that in becoming aware of this we begin the process of transforming the oppressive structures we have produced.

(Dean *et al.* 2005: 17)

In order to emphasise the continuity between CR phases, Bhaskar invokes Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* ([1848] 1986) here to define what the former calls the ‘eudemonistic’ society: the free development of each as the condition of the free development of all (Bhaskar 2002b: 33; Marx and Engels [1848] 1986: 54). Indeed, there is a sense in which Bhaskar is saying more than that there is continuity between stages. In DCR, it seemed that it was just dialectical contradictions that were parasitic upon dialectical connections. Now he appears to be saying that the whole of four-planar social being itself is parasitic on a deeper level of spiritual/transcendent reality. DEN categories of being are classified as identical with ill-being; thus it is itself parasitic, rather than the terrain within which being was to be realised. By this logic, the eudemonistic society will be reached only when we abandon the immanentist–materialist ontology that Marx and Engels formulated and only through a re-engagement with our transcendental

selves – an act of mere free will – can we absent the oppressive structures that we inhabit in demi-reality.

In all of this, we might be forgiven for asking if Bhaskar is pushing CR towards idealism. I argued in *Rethinking Marxism* that emergentist materialism was (or at least should be) the basic foundation of Bhaskar's CR/DCR works. With the spiritual turn, one wonders if he now embraces Mind First ontologism as the base stratum of reality. In *FEW*, he referred to this stratum using religious language by calling the totality in difference that is the asymmetrical relation between metaReality and demi-reality simply "God". As I have indicated, his meta-philosophy writings were designed to deepen and enrich the TDCR themes, especially by emphasising the centrality of non-duality to the spiritual turn. The metaReality books were therefore attempts to expound and develop the main themes of his TDCR. This deepening is the attempt to sharpen *FEW*'s agenda of comprehending Absolute Being, which PMR is supposed to represent (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 168). This was dictated by Bhaskar's sense that the spiritual stratum was not necessarily expressed religiously. It was just as possible that our embeddedness within, and apprehension of, this spiritual essence could be given secular expression (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 149–50). The most obvious example of this was his reclassification of the spiritual base stratum as the 'cosmic envelope' (Bhaskar 2002a: 207; 2002b: 54–9). All emergent things, regardless of their differentiation from each other, display evidence of a 'fine structure' (Bhaskar 2002b: ix), according to which they share an underlying connectivity and identity of universal being. In *FEW*, this was God, but in the metaReality writings, it is the 'cosmic envelope'. This is 'the basic constituent of a concretely singularised and differentiated complexity that is the universe' (Morgan 2003: 125). The emergence of materiality from the base stratum of the fine structure, together with all the emergent strata (via SEPM) within materiality (physical, chemical, biological, social, etc.), are themselves part of this wider unity-in-difference of the cosmic envelope. Therefore, the strata emergent from SEPM are now seen to have a basic common constituent.

Now the question is whether this points CR in the direction of ontological idealism. In *PMR*, Bhaskar makes an interesting point. He argues that 'there is an inverse chain or synchronic order of ontological priority in the increasing determinacy with which consciousness enfolds itself in matter; and makes matter a synchronically emergent or derivative power of consciousness, while at the same time allowing that consciousness can be diachronically emergent from matter' (Bhaskar 2002b: 70 [emphasis added]). If we are saying that non-dualistic states of being such as creativity, freedom and love are constitutive of reality, then we are insisting that consciousness is implicit in emergent materiality. As Bhaskar puts it: 'transcendence signifies the breaking down of duality or opposition or separateness within a context' (Bhaskar 2002a: 208), the overcoming of subject–object distinctions (Bhaskar 2002a: 140–141; 208–209) known as *transcendental identification in consciousness* (hereafter TIC) (Bhaskar 2000: 46; 2002a: 215). Indeed, he argues that the very capacity for TIC with other objects in the universe is enough to prove that the latter 'must be implicitly

(if not explicitly) characterised by consciousness (which is enfolded or evolved within them)' (Bhaskar 2002a: 213). The universe, in short, is implicitly conscious (Bhaskar 2002a: 214). Once again, this new position in his thinking is explained in terms of the deepening of key CR themes. He invokes SEPM, which we have seen posits consciousness as an emergent power of matter. But Bhaskar thinks that this seemingly straightforward materialist standpoint on the mind–matter debate can be rendered compatible with the idealist view of matter as a synchronic emergent power of consciousness – *synchronic emergent powers consciousness* or 'SEPC' (Bhaskar 2002a: 215) – by invoking this idea of *implicit* or *potential* consciousness. It also logically follows, he tells us, that if this is so, then the universe is implicit or enfolded within *my* individual consciousness, a process known as *co-presence* (Bhaskar 2002a: 215). In this way, one person's understanding of another or their capacity to be identified with (in the sense of being at one with other objects) entails their mutual co-presence. This is a powerful example of how Bhaskar wishes to deepen the DCR category of 3L, whereby the intra-relatedness of all things is grasped (Bhaskar 2002a: 234). So, too, does he wish to render explicit what is implicit in Marx and Engels' statement from the *Manifesto* by saying that suppressing the free creativity perpetrated by one person or group of people against others is an act of universal suppression against all (including the perpetrators), precisely by virtue of the co-presence of the victims of such injustice within those who commit it. In short, co-presence is the expression of the reclassification of DEN concepts in terms of spirituality and transcendence.

Mervyn Hartwig makes the pertinent point that, in all of this, it seems that 'matter is the product of a logically prior but notional moment of involution of consciousness' (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 186). But in his discussion with Hartwig, Bhaskar is not comfortable with this classification, insisting that PMR does not necessarily involve a commitment to idealism:

Let us just call it the cosmic envelope. Consciousness and self-awareness can be thought of as powers or potentialities of beings in that envelope, of some beings anyway, looked at in a very broad historical perspective. You can make sense of evolution then ... initially the universe emerged out of nothing. Something came out of nothing, then as evolution proceeds we unfold more and more possibilities until, at the end of the day, we get everything in everything.

(Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 186–187)

Hartwig presses Bhaskar on the issue:

You seem to go along with traditional cosmologies in seeing the emergence of the cosmos as an act of consciousness, of a creator or god who 'self-creates himself out of the void'. Your notional 'involution of consciousness' corresponds to the decent of consciousness in traditional cosmologies.

(Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 187)

In response, Bhaskar invokes the mystery of the Big Bang theory, ‘which posits as explosion out of nothing and eventually an implosion into nothing’ (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 187), by which I take him to mean that in positing the base stratum of reality as an act of self-creation ‘out of the void’ (Bhaskar 2002b: 110), PMR is consistent with mainstream cosmological scientific thinking about the origins of the universe. This could be the PMR expression of what physicists call the “Higgs boson particle” – a sub-atomic particle that gives all matter its mass. This basic building block is pejoratively called “the God particle” and was confirmed to exist in March 2013 by scientists working with the Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland. But scientists are increasingly coming to the view that the Big Bang was not, in fact, the beginning, but may have been simply one in a possibility infinite series of such massive explosions. The “Big Crunch” theory, for example, where the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago was just one of an infinite series of explosions and contractions carried on into infinity or the various “multiverse” theories suggest that the explosion that brought our universe into existence was not a singularity. One does not have to posit any act of self-creation “out of nothing” in order to explain the Big Bang. The discovery of the Higgs boson particle may be completely consistent with a materialist cosmology. Equally, Bhaskar’s cosmic envelope may indeed be compatible with cosmologies that posit consciousness as the singularity that causes the emergence of matter.

My own view is that the cosmic envelope may indeed be compatible with materialism. Let me elucidate with reference to the contrasting types of teleologism that I believe are at work in CR/DCR, on the one hand, and PMR, on the other. We have seen that dialectical contradictions are the energising force of the emergence of rhythmical and totalising processes. Under the terms of my materialist reading of DCR, although parasitic upon dialectical connections, contradiction and detotalisation therefore provide the driving force towards eudemonia by the emancipative social theorising and activity that emerges in response to detotalising social and economic relations. I argued in *Rethinking Marxism*, incorporating the weak *a priorism* of historical materialism, that this involves clear non-teleological evolutionism to history, as evidenced in Engels’ theory of internal stratification–emergence (Agar 2006: 172–177). I contended that we can detect an evolutionary but non-teleological evolutionism in Engels’ historical materialism in the sense that he deduces a common origin to emergent material strata, but falls short of saying that evolutionary emergence was in any way necessary or pre-ordained (Engels 1988: 44–45). This rests on the view that nature is ultimately an external force, despite the human capacity to transform it for our own ends. In this book – particularly in Chapter 6 – I now wish to take issue with this classification as “non-teleological”. The externality of nature and contingency of human existence should not be seen as evidence of the folly of treating nature and human history teleologically, but rather as limiting directionality and purpose to the domain of meeting embodied species’ needs. As we will see in Chapter 6, this commits historical materialists to *finite* teleology, rather than non-teleology as such. Accordingly, I wish to sharpen my definition to

include finite and infinite varieties that reflect immanent and transcendent approaches to post-secularism and utopia. Under this improved definition, historical materialism embraces finite teleology of the transformative labouring Subject. This involves the ability to satisfy the life process determined by nature, but the inability to transcend Darwinian laws and qualitatively transform the human and natural world. Infinite-teleology, by contrast, implies such a qualitative distinction. As we will see when we look at Hegelian panentheism, when allied to explicitly idealist philosophy, this includes the additional assertion that human evolution and the satisfaction of the life process is somehow pre-ordained and required by the universe.

But infinite teleologism does not necessarily have to take this additional step. Indeed, Bhaskar himself does not seem to want to go this far, either. To be sure, he appears to be breaking with finite and moving towards infinite-teleology. This is made possible by non-duality. But there is no evidence that he thinks this process is energised by some extra-human dimension or (Mind First) stratum that requires it. As Jamie Morgan points out: '(working backwards through the logic of emergence) all possibilities must be inherent in previous times and prior forms of matter' (Morgan 2003: 125). But as Bhaskar himself argues, even though evolution indicates that amoebas imply the possibility of humans, it does not indicate their *necessary* evolution (Bhaskar 2002b: 127). There are infinite teleological and possibly anthropologist implications here that, at first glance, might seem to bring PMR into close proximity with certain theistic cosmologies that posit directionality to evolutionary processes.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps such potential for compatibility is an example of how PMR and traditional theistic (and also panentheistic) metaphysics might be contingently (if not necessarily) related. But I also think that there is scope for cross-fertilisation with forms of materialism. As we will see in [Chapter 6](#), Ernst Bloch's process metaphysics begins from a materialist position, but proceeds – as I understand him – to posit synchronically emergent consciousness that has the capacity to create new forms of both material and non-material being. To be sure, this is less a ground-state and more a future state of the universe's existence that involves harmony and intra-connectivity that is brought into being by the radically creative and open character of consciousness. We will see that this is possible, because Bloch posits Hope as an ontological category of all matter that is brought into realisation by human beings. I argue drawing upon Bloch's concept of radically creative matter, but going beyond him, that this is the vision of a post-materialist form of existence. We will explore how the concept of metaReality helps us (and Bloch) go beyond Marxian finite teleologism and embrace a kind of post-materialist infinite teleologism where human consciousness can transcend mere embodied anthropological species' needs in the creation of qualitatively new and unimagined strata of being. This is to extend our understanding of what Bhaskar describes above as the 'powers or potentialities of beings in that [cosmic] envelope, of some beings anyway, looked at in a very broad historical perspective'. This "consciousness potential" is not present at some basic constituent stratum of existence, as it seems to be for Bhaskar, but is itself emergent over time. Humans (and other

beings capable of at least an equivalent level of agency) become the means whereby an ultimate harmonisation of being is brought into existence, but as a future stage in the development of the universe. Therefore, metaReality is not a conception of transcendent reality as foundational, but is futurist with the level of agentive praxis that humans are capable of as the key energising force for its emergence. In conclusion to this work, I will also argue that this does not necessarily have to commit us to an anthropic reduction of CR ontology. MetaReality is a trans-human creation, but the stratum or strata of reality that it heralds are irreducible to a system of human species' needs.

It is for these reasons that I cannot go along with Sean Creaven's belief that the metaReality books are little more than a restatement of Bhaskar's definition of God in *FEW*, but now divested of its explicitly theistic content (Creaven 2010: 27). For Creaven, it is a redescription of his theistic point that all material reality contains divinity within itself. He argues, for example, that 'the concept of the cosmic envelope performs an identical function to the earlier God-concept' (Creaven 2010: 22). This is because the cosmic envelope is not just a totalising force or ultimate constituent of being, but is 'the energy or spirit that binds the differentiated structures of reality together as part of a cosmic whole' (Creaven 2010: 22). All things are made up of the basic constituents of the fine structure. Our understanding of the philosophy of internal relations at 3L, as superior to non-dialectical theories where things are merely externally related, is deepened. This is because it is now grasped non-dualistically –i.e. in the context of PMR's classification of internality as co-presence. The necessary *intra*-connection between things that is their common constituent property is not that of their material embodied existences at the level of four-planar social being, but of their transcendent ground-state upon which the former is parasitic. This is why Creaven is uncomfortable with PMR, because it is highly suggestive of a continuing undercurrent to Bhaskar's philosophy in the metaReality books that is at least supportive of theistic ontology, even if the explicit "God Hypothesis" of *FEW* is no longer evident. It is the 'idealisation of ontology that lies at the centre of the MR philosophy' (Creaven 2010: 23) that renders it susceptible to theistic appropriation. But as I have said, the non-duality at the heart of metaReality does not necessarily commit us to such an idealisation of reality. In any case, I will also argue that PMR, precisely because of its non-dualistic credentials, is just as likely to be *incompatible* with theism by virtue of the latter's dualistic metaphysics. For Creaven, the ontological deepening of 3L that such concepts of cosmic envelope and fine structure entail, when applied to the emergence of human beings, involves an underlying teleologism and anthropocentrism that is sustained by ontological idealism. Such anthropocentrism is what Creaven calls a 'Promethean super-humanism that was previously supported by [Bhaskar's] God-concept' (Creaven 2010: 23). In other words, for Creaven, PMR seems little more than a non-theistic restatement of the spiritualistic monism and mysticism of *FEW* that we saw above that Bhaskar thought unites all materiality as essentially "godlike" and existing in a fundamental state of ontological harmony. We are still in the terrain of an idealist ontological monism

where all things that exist in our differentiated universe are bound together into a cosmic whole by virtue of this commonality, whether we call it God or merely the cosmic envelope of the fine structure. To call this a non-theistic restatement is to oversimplify it. As we will see, there are points of convergence and divergence with Hegelian panentheism and Blochean transcendental materialism – evidence that PMR is more complex and nuanced than Creaven seems prepared to acknowledge.

I wish to return briefly to the concept of the transcendental self, because it is of great importance to how the Bhaskar of the metaReality books thinks that eudemonia comes from an act of free will by the individual. Given that the ground-state properties of human beings take a unique form in our consciousness and activity, self-enlightenment consists of becoming fully aware of this ground-state by the individual and through the individual to the whole of society. This is what we saw as the necessary non-dual element of common everyday activities above. Interestingly, this awareness involves what Bhaskar calls ‘present moment awareness’ (Bhaskar 2002b: 19) – i.e. not allowing one’s vision of belonging to a transcendent other to be occluded by daydreams about the past or the future. We will see when we look at Bloch’s creative materialism how not only is such utopian dreaming compatible with transcendence, emancipatory discourse and praxis towards the eudemonistic society are rendered impossible without its mediation. We will see in [Chapter 6](#) that this hinges on the key point of divergence from Bhaskar (previously highlighted) – the transcendent dimension is emergent *from* nature, rather than its “ground-state”.

It would therefore be instructive to elaborate on the vindication of non-duality that Bhaskar’s TDCR/MR entails. But because the metaReality books invite us to view TR-DCR in terms of a profound deepening of the scope of rationality to include DEN, I think that they make an important contribution to immanent utopia as well. By inviting us to critically appraise the pre-spiritual phase of CR, they shine a powerful light on its utopian content, even if some may not follow Bhaskar into the realms of ontological transcendence.

### **Widening rationality: duality, non-duality/transcendence and the deepening of critical realism**

As we have seen, the key CR categories that we have looked at of transitivity/intransitivity, deontologisation, objectivity–subjectivity, the anti-empiricist duality of structure and agency of TMSA and the attendant concepts of the epistemic, ontic and antropic fallacies all rest on dualistic presuppositions. I have to admit that I have been deeply influenced by duality in the past. As I explained above, my discussion, for example, of the emancipative implications of TMSA operated on the presumption that EC was limited in its competence to the same realm of the sciences. My identification of a weak *a priorism* at work within Bhaskar’s system of thought was a major aspect of *Rethinking Marxism*. The depth realism it achieves is not such that it can legitimately speak about the world beyond that which can be captured scientifically. It is only valid in

drawing (transcendental) philosophical conclusions from what the sciences tell us – a position that I argued was a key inheritance from Kant's transcendental idealist arguments as they are presented in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Guyer and Wood 1998). As part of my general purposes of demonstrating the Marxist credentials of Bhaskar's writings inclusive of DPF and how Marxian methodology prefigures so much of the latter's approach, I identified a Kantian inheritance in Marx's philosophy. At the risk of oversimplifying my account, following the thought-matter distinction at the heart of Kant's synthetic *a priorism*, I described Marx's inheritance as the 'Kantian-style concern to establish concept formation as grounded in the perception of the intrinsically non-rational thing-in-itself' (Agar 2006: 196). I have given ample textual evidence from Bhaskar's own writings to suggest that this essentially Kantian critique is compatible with his position.<sup>6</sup>

As I indicated at the start of this chapter, the Bhaskar of the spiritual turn obviously thinks there is no reason to believe that non-duality heralds a significant problem for CR themes. He does this in *RMR* by arguing that PMR is part of a narrative of immanent critique that has always been important to CR depth realism. And in so uncovering, CR has widened the scope and subject matter that may come under the auspices of rational analysis and discussion. At the risk of oversimplification, PMR is presented as the application of CR immanent critique that reveals a level of depth to reality that calls into question the duality that underpins not only competing theories, but even its own first four phases. Just as DCR is the first major revolution in CR by applying immanent critique to non-dialectical TR/CN/EC, so PMR is the second by applying immanent critique to the duality at the heart of CR/DCR. Just as dialectics are rationalised by the first move, transcendence is by the second in the sense that the idea of a spiritualistic/transcendent dimension that is foundational to all material reality may demand rational explanation.

Firstly, CR is itself a dialectical process in the sense that the deficiencies in dominant theoretical positions (e.g. positivism, hermeneutics or post-modernism) are grasped as absences that the relevant CR phase endeavours to absent in its resolution. This achieves a retotalisation of theoretical approaches to the problem field of immanent critique with each of the five phases representing a response to incoherencies in opposing philosophical positions:

... pursuing the practice of immanent critique, what critical realism does or has done in each phase of its development is to locate a glaring inconsistency, contradiction or anomaly in the theoretical position it orientates itself against, showing how this contradiction or inconsistency itself stems from an incompleteness or constitutive absence in the pre-existing philosophical problem field that currently dominates the field in question. The critical/therapeutic work of critical realism is just to repair this absence, which, by re-totalising the existing theoretical scene will inevitably involve some re-description of what was already present therein.

(Bhaskar 2002a: 176–177)

Accordingly, TR deals with the absence of ontological depth or even of an explicit commitment to ontology at all, as we have seen. As Bhaskar argues in *RTS*, the empiricist dissolution of ontology is logically incoherent and results in the epistemic fallacy. And as we have just seen, TR sets the precedent for the pursuit of depth ontology in subsequent CR phases. In the process of opening up new levels of ontology at each stage, it logically follows that there will be implications for rational discourse in philosophy and the social sciences, because in bringing into view areas of being that were hitherto off-limits we are enriching and deepening the sorts of things that may be worthy of rational discussion. In other words, certain taboos are broken when it comes to what can be deemed worthy of rationality. In TR, ontology once again becomes rationally defensible; in CN, that of dualities in the social sciences in the pursuit of an anti-empiricist naturalism; in EC, of appraising the rationality of positing evaluative concepts such as fulfilment and ill-being as real properties of the world; in DCR, of admitting that absence and negativity are crucial aspects of reality; and in TDCR/MR, of exploring the extent to which spirituality and transcendence may be valid sites of rational discourse (Bhaskar 2002a: 177–178; Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 147).

In this sense, the pursuit of depth realism that results from immanent critique establishes a continuity of purpose throughout all the CR phases – widening rationality. If we look at things in this way, then the pre-spiritual and spiritual phases looks a little less discontinuous than they might otherwise appear. The duality–non-duality issue, which, as I strongly implied above, divides along Kantian lines, can be seen as part of a deepening whereby duality itself is transcended. So Bhaskar wants to apply immanent critique to the CR phases themselves (Bhaskar 2002a: 178–179; Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 147). That is, each new phase is CR's self-critique of 'its own dialectical past' (Bhaskar 2002a: 179). This can be seen in the way that the Bhaskar of the metaReality books wants us to reappraise the significance of DCR for TR, CN and EC in terms of its 'systematic attempt to think being in a systematically progressive way' (Bhaskar 2002a: 181). The 1M-4D phases – also known as "MELD" (Bhaskar 2000: 150; 2002a: 36, 180) – of DCR can now be seen as corresponding to each CR phase. The first phase (1M) is to simply think being as such (TR re-vindication of ontology). The second phase (2E) helps us to grasp the dualities of structure and agency, intentions and actions of CN in terms of real contradictions and dualities in social reality. Thus, absence and negativity are seen as real, helping us to understand social being in its processuality (Bhaskar 2002a: 185). The third phase (3L) deepens our grasp of EC by allowing us to see being in its totality and ill-being in its detotality – that is, in terms of DEN. We saw above that 3L concepts of internality, entity relationism, intra-action, holistic causality and the like deepen EC's positing of real fulfilled/ill-being as real constituent properties of the world that can be analysed using the resources of the anti-positivist naturalism that CR promotes. For example, the EC concept of *categorical realism* posits alienating and detotalising false or misguided concepts/categories as nevertheless embedded within real non-alienating categories

(Bhaskar 2002a: 199). Such false categories (e.g. the wage-form) are thus embedded within, and parasitic upon, real totalising categories (socialised labouring processes). And the fourth phase (4D) helps us grasp DCR itself as the recognition of the centrality of transformative social praxis to being (Bhaskar 2002a: 181).

TDCR, in turn, encourages us to rethink this deepening still further by seeing the dialecticisation of each phase undertaken by DCR as pervaded by spirituality and transcendence (Bhaskar 2000: 150). Dialecticised concepts of objective being (totality) and unfulfilled being (detotality) are now grasped non-dualistically – i.e. as corresponding to metaReal and demi-real conditions of existence, thereby deepening our understanding of what we mean by key DEN terms. The result of both DCR and TDCR/PMR deepening moments is to widen the scope of rationality by identifying objective meaning/value in concepts of being, on the one hand, and spirituality and transcendence, on the other. Just as DEN makes it judgementally rational to speak of objective meaning in the world, so TDCR/MR, by deepening the terms of this meaning, makes it judgementally rational to speak of meaning in terms of spirituality and transcendence.

Therefore, what is categorically real includes ‘the self-alienation of human beings from their Self or soul … alienation of human beings from their social-natural Totality (including the structures of four-planar social life), and ultimately the cosmos’ (Bhaskar 2000: 33). The continuity of purpose from DEN is again evident here, in that Bhaskar seems to be claiming that non-duality is, in a sense, prefigured or at least is anticipated in the DCR schema, despite the ease with which we could identify dualistic intent within it. This anticipation takes the form of a fifth dimension or “Aspect” – (hereafter 5A). MELD now becomes MELDA (Bhaskar 2002a: 180–181). This is fair enough, but I think that MELD can just as easily function without 5A. If so, then the categorical and depth realism of humanity’s ‘social-natural Totality’ that the metaReality books have drawn our attention to becomes important for immanent utopianism.

### **Non-duality as “re-enchantment”**

The prefiguration or anticipation in DCR that MR identifies is significant, because it is at the heart of Bhaskar’s attempt to locate the entire CR project as consonant with his reaction to the end of the Cold War and the neo-liberal triumphalism of Fukuyama’s so-called “end of history” thesis. It also has implications for my purposes in this book of exploring the possibility of a cross-fertilisation of PMR with Hegelian and post-Hegelian utopian political thought and my attempt to explore immanent and meta-post-secularism from within this tradition in particular. Grasping non-duality in this way frees transcendence from the purposes in *FEW* that made it compatible with a limited set of philosophical systems that involve an explicit “God-concept” and opens up contact with non-dualistic ideas that have no particular association with defences of traditional religious metaphysical systems. In his discussions with Mervyn Hartwig, for example, Bhaskar makes it clear that at the heart of the endeavour to introduce transcendence into

depth realism was the need to uncover the spiritualistic and transcendent aspects of all facets of existence. Thus it was not just emancipative projects that were to be understood in this way, but even everyday life (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 167–168, 172), such as the mundane examples given above of reading, playing sports, etc. In this way, a path was open to explore spiritualistic aspects of all reality, without his thinking becoming hamstrung by too close an association with an explicit “God-concept” or, as Bhaskar argues, ‘God became the cosmic envelope and, as the god within, the ground-state. What I wanted to do was to make spirituality compatible with secularism’ (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 168). He identifies a transcendental identification between people and between people and objects that grounds everyday life, which indicates ‘a level of praxis that is hidden, a hidden substratum to social life’ (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 172). Indeed, PMR allows us to penetrate

into the deeper human, natural and spiritual presuppositions of the traditional emancipatory projects of the radical left in the west.... [E]mbedded within these projects were deeply spiritual assumptions about human nature and possibilities which had nowhere informed actually existing socialist projects.

(Bhaskar 2002a: 173–174)

In a sense, he tells us, ‘many secularists and atheists implicitly have a religion, or absolute, or a sense of ultimate concerns, that imparts coherence, identity and form to their understandings and practice’ (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 148). Obviously, most socialists (but not all) are generally proud of their secular credentials. Thankfully, PMR concepts of the cosmic envelope and ground-state are ‘susceptible of a purely secular interpretation’ (Bhaskar and Callinicos 2003: 104), thus rendering them, it is hoped, compatible with emancipative and progressive theories that are nourished by secular theories (Bhaskar 2002a: 228). By understanding 1M–4D deepening of ontology as corresponding to TR-DCR phases, PMR performed precisely this task of uncovering deep-seated spiritual presuppositions about all levels of human nature that were always there in radical Left critical theory, but which were simply occluded by dualistic thinking (Bhaskar 2002a: 174).

TIC’s overcoming of subject–object distinctions can take the form of the dissolution of a subject’s consciousness in their everyday life where he/she becomes one with something other than him/herself (e.g. when he/she becomes “lost” in a book or piece of music). Bhaskar also tells us that this dissolution is, in fact, a necessary condition of any kind of inter-subjective communication or understanding (Bhaskar 2002a: 209). On the other hand, it can involve the loss of objectivity where one retreats into his/her own world ‘becoming one with oneself and only oneself’ (Bhaskar 2002a: 209) – e.g. in meditation. In addition, Bhaskar identifies transcendence in agency where social actors become one with specific actions that they undertake (such as cooking a meal or playing sports) (Bhaskar 2002a: 209–210).

This is, he tells us, evidence of the transcendental self, where we become conscious of the ground-state of one's being. Viewed in this light, the link between the famous slogan cited above from the *Communist Manifesto*, within which Bhaskar identifies certain spiritualistic resonances (especially that of Mahayana Buddhism), and his eudemonistic society seems a little less paradoxical. Bhaskar's purpose in invoking Marx and Engels is to show how non-duality and transcendence are foundational to *all* social being, including the struggles for eudemonia on the terrain of man's material species-being that Marxism has often spearheaded. Again, we see evidence of the deepening beyond the DCR concept of dialectical connection and four-planar social being – intra-connectivity and harmony of human beings becomes spiritual, rather than something exhausted by their material conditions of existence. In fact, this brings us to a feature of the deepening that PMR heralds – that the reality that dualistic systems including CR and Marxism are parasitic upon is non-duality (Bhaskar and Callinicos 2003: 103). It logically follows that demi-reality is parasitic, given how the ground-state is the base stratum of human being. In other words, emergent properties of matter described in SEPM are dualistic and thus demi-real, but are existentially dependent on a non-dual state in the sense that the latter is their condition of possibility.

We have seen that Bhaskar is not trying to diminish the realist credentials of the whole CR system before PMR. Nor does he think that acknowledging non-duality commit us to a voluntarist approach to emancipative tasks, such as those often demanded by critical theory. I will briefly outline his denial that PMR involves a simple voluntarism before explaining why I think there are some difficulties with it. Bhaskar is not saying that the causes of suffering and injustice in the world that radical Left politics uncovers – such as capitalism, commodification, etc. – are somehow unreal by virtue of their demi-real status. Remember the implications of the thorough spiritualisation of EC – 3L deepens our grasp of the categorical realism of EC by allowing us to see being/ill-being in its totality/detotality together with the true/false consciousness that emerges from and sustains totalising/detotalising social structures. The illusions of capitalist economics and its culture of wealth creation based entirely on debt and credit (brought into clear focus with the conclusive failure of neo-liberalism in the global economic crash of 2008), together with the structures that are their expression, are part of that totality. They are therefore not to be simply wished away, because they are 'real in the sense that [they are] causally efficacious and so part of the world' (Bhaskar and Callinicos 2003: 104–105). Bhaskar invokes the pioneer of neo-liberal economics Margaret Thatcher and her famous "*there is no alternative*" (hereafter TINA) compromise formation here to illustrate the complexity of totalities by virtue of the co-existence of illusory and true beliefs with the former parasitic on the latter. He gives the example of Marx's exposure regarding how the categories of exchange are falsely used to describe the real categories of production on which they depend, thereby occluding the real source of capitalist production – the extraction of surplus value from unpaid labour (Bhaskar 2002a: 202). Even economic structures of oppressive and unjust

relations, such as those which embrace the exchange value, presuppose acts of transcendental identification by the agents involved – in this case, the production of use-values. But also in the basic trust and solidarity between even the worker and his/her bourgeois masters that must exist in order for the capitalist mode of production to work. For Bhaskar, this was evidence that Marx himself identified ‘a mystical transcendental identification in that act of exchange of commodities’ (Bhaskar and Callinicos 2003: 106). Behind or rather beyond all such dualistic relations can be found the non-duality of the human ground-state.

The linkage of TIC to explicitly Marxian themes is interesting, but it seems to me that in highlighting how the alienating relations of capitalism are parasitic on deeper levels of solidarity, Bhaskar is closer to the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (*EPM*) than to the *Manifesto*. That is, he seems to be interpreting key phrases from later Marxian texts from the perspective of the *EPM*. We must remember, however, that there are significant differences between Marx at this stage of his intellectual development and when he and Engels had formulated their mature historical materialist position. As we will see in Chapter 6, in his youth, Marx was still under the influence of Feuerbach’s species concept. This exhibits key aspects of Hegel’s subject–object identity, but grasped materialistically – i.e. in terms of *nature*’s (rather than Spirit’s) self-movement. We will see that under Feuerbach’s original formulation, this concept embraces a species universalism that is essentially an anthropological perspectivist (i.e. human-centric) grasp of Absolute Spirit. There are, as we will see, limits to the influence that this concept has on the youthful Marx, because, even in these pre-historical materialist writings, anthropocentric sensualism is grasped in terms of labour activity, rather than abstractly, as it does for Feuerbach. But I will argue that there is still evidence of the definition of nature as a social category and so an endorsement of the Hegelian insistence on a fundamental subject–object identity (but grasped immanently, rather than in Hegel’s own meta-utopian terms). This position is modified by Marx and Engels when they formulate historical materialism to take into consideration the externality of nature as permanent. For this reason, the *EPM* are unreliable as a guide to the fundamental principles of Marxian philosophy, so I remain unconvinced that TIC can be so easily applied to a historical materialist context.

Equipped with such a concept of universal species-essence, it is easier to identify transcendental causes of conditions of solidarity and identification. But once Marx and Engels had formulated historical materialism (and especially as they sharpened its Darwinian credentials in the years after 1859), they were firmly on the terrain of an immanent utopia predicated on the permanence of nature’s externality where relations of solidarity and identification were products of evolutionary (finite-teleological) mechanisms that brought about the transformative labouring Subject. In other words, when they abandoned the species concept and, with it, transcendence, they sought concrete materialist explanations using the resources of Darwinian–Marxism. TIC may have important contributions to make to some forms of Leftist materialism (as we will see), but Bhaskar’s attempt to render it compatible with a Marxist ontological agenda is

somewhat strained. It is more likely to find a receptive audience with Bloch than with Marx and Engels (but as we will see in [Chapter 6](#), in accommodating himself to such ideas, Bloch is moving materialism away from Marxian thought).

Non-duality, to summarise, has existential primacy over duality and identity for Bhaskar in two ways. First, it is the condition of possibility of the material universe, including our experiences of the emergent stratum, that social and political theorists are most interested in – society. This involves the suffering and injustices that seem to pervade it. This is non-duality as *constitutive* of all reality (both good and bad). It is also, second, the basis of our ground-state qualities of creativity, freedom and love (Bhaskar 2002a: 207; Bhaskar and Callinicos 2003: 106, 110–111). This is important to the emancipative content of PMR, because the injustice, oppression and selfishness at the heart of the capitalist mode of production and the system of exchange values that it involves are dualities that rely on these ground-state qualities. An asymmetry is therefore opened up between the unfair and unjust demi-reality and the innate goodness of our ground-state that presupposes it. Justice, freedom and solidarity have existential primacy over the consequently immeasurably weaker qualities of their converse. To posit non-duality as constitutive of reality is particularly interesting for our purposes, because it makes a significant contribution to Hegelian and post-Hegelian approaches to meta-utopia. It is also important because, as I have already suggested in this chapter, it invites us to think carefully about what we mean exactly by secularism. It is a powerful example of the poverty of dominant definitions of the secular age. I wish to explore the contribution that PMR makes to this process in more detail. In the next chapter, I define secularism as the process of disenchantment of the world that began with the rise of the great scholastic theistic philosophers of the Middle Ages, continued into early modernity and was completed with the Enlightenment and its aftermath. It is appropriate to place PMR in a tradition of thought that has challenged dominant trends in Western philosophy from classical theism to the narrow secular forms that emancipative political ideologies such as liberalism, socialism and post-modernity have taken.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See *Rethinking Marxism*, [Chapter 1](#).
- <sup>2</sup> Existential constitution involves a type of intra-action when ‘one element or aspect (moment or determination, relation, etc.), e<sub>2</sub>, is essential and intrinsic to … another, e<sub>1</sub>’ (Bhaskar 1993: 123). Permeation occurs when ‘e<sub>2</sub> is present within, although not essential to the nature of e<sub>1</sub>, the sense in which e<sub>1</sub> may be said to contain e<sub>2</sub>’ (Bhaskar 1993: 123). And connection occurs when ‘one element, e<sub>2</sub>, is causally efficacious on an element internally related to it, e<sub>1</sub>’ (Bhaskar 1993: 123).
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Marx’s ontology of relations see my discussions in *Rethinking Marxism* (Agar 2006: 177–180) and also Ollman (1977, 2003).
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Engels’ labour theory of culture (Engels 2002). For an examination of his anthropological materialism, see Harman (1994) and Creaven (2000: 48–58). I also explore this in the context of argument in [Chapter 6](#) – namely, that it is a powerful

contribution to historical materialist immanent utopianism. Whenever Bhaskar undertakes the spiritual turn, however, there is a decisive move away from ontological immanence to ontological transcendence. The process of “deepening” reality reaches a stage where the utility of the CR system to Marxian materialism becomes difficult to sustain for reasons that will become clear later (in particular in [Chapter 6](#), where I argue that Marx and Engels reject transcendence).

- 5 It may even be compatible with traditional Christian cosmologies – for example, the Augustinian teleologism expounded by Christian theologian Alistair McGrath. For Augustine, the created order contains within it ‘a series of dormant multiple potencies’ (McGrath 2009: 103), which could be actualised at a later stage in its development. This was known as the ontological concept of *rationes seminales*. As McGrath observes: ‘God must be thought of as creating in that very first moment the potencies for all the kinds of living beings that would come later, including humanity’ (McGrath 2009: 103). For McGrath, Augustinianism ‘offers an intellectual framework for reflecting on the evolution of the natural world’ (McGrath 2009: 199). Within this interpretative framework, Christianity can offer interesting analyses of so-called *anthropic coincidences*. From this perspective, the observation of the fundamental constants of the universe is suggestive that it has been created in such a way as to encourage the emergence of a biosphere (McGrath 2009: 119–120). And even within the biosphere itself, McGrath points to scientific studies that have revealed evidence of a fine-tuning process within biological evolutionary processes – chemical elements out of which the biological stratum emerges have to be such, so as to allow it to emerge in the first place (McGrath 2009: 141). Fundamental chemical properties need to be in place before the process of biological evolution can take place (McGrath 2009: 180–181). The philosophical implications of this are clear for McGrath – anthropic phenomena in the biosphere points to evolutional directionality, i.e. biological teleologism. He refers to what some evolutionary biologists and philosophers of biology call *convergent evolution*; according to which evolutionary outcomes have an unmistakable predictability (McGrath 2009: 192). I will comment more on the significance of convergent evolution for PMR in later chapters, especially in relation to Hegelian panentheism. For a detailed examination of the theory of convergent evolution and its implications for our understanding of human evolution, see Conway Morris (2003). For now, it is enough to state that there may indeed be certain points of contact between Augustinian natural theology and PMR.

6 See Agar (2005, 2006, [Chapter 3](#)).

## **2 Secularism, post-secularism, transcendence and rationality**

In this chapter, I wish to expand on the three approaches to transcendence that has dominated many philosophical and political debates in the academy and in wider society. I noted these briefly in the introduction as radical secularism, immanent post-secularism and meta-post-secularism. The rejection of transcendence characteristic of the first two positions often rests on the presumption that arguments for the existence of a transcendent dimension to reality cannot be rationally defended. Both groups endorse (either explicitly or implicitly) the epistemological superiority of scientifically informed normative values. Where immanent post-secularism departs from radical secularism is in the former's belief that there are causes of transcendent worldviews beyond mere irrationality, superstition and delusion. That is, while radical secularists (such as the new atheists) think that such worldviews are thoroughly irrational and even evil, immanent post-secularists believe there is rational content to them that is sustained beyond the discrediting of their metaphysical truth claims. This agreement with radical secularism explains the general reluctance or inability (or both) on the part of immanent post-secularists to break the secularist taboo on taking seriously what I regard as a fundamental tenet of meta-post-secular discourse – the rationality of transcendence. My main targets for analysis (and criticism) here will be John Rawls, Emil Durkheim and, in the next chapter, Marcel Gauchet. Furthermore, even when theorists manage to break the taboo, they tend to have an operative definition of transcendence that is in keeping with that of classical theism – i.e. one that remains wedded to duality. I have in mind Charles Taylor's writings on spirituality and transcendence here. As we have seen, meta-post-secularism and meta-utopia involve some sort of ontological non-duality. These thinkers challenge disenchantment and reintroduce enchanted views of reality. We begin our discussions in this chapter by exploring Roy Bhaskar's meta-utopian attempt to re-enchant the world as a challenge to modernity – the tradition that has done so much for the processes of disenchantment.

## **PMR, philosophical modernity and the ego-non-ego dichotomy of disenchantment**

In the last chapter, we saw how PMR makes an important case for re-enchantment. The Bhaskar of the spiritual turn constructs a powerful critique of secularist disenchantment, because for him, contra dominant philosophical discourses of modernity, the universe is pervaded with meaning and intrinsic value. This was seen in what I called the second revolution of CR, where core DEN concepts of dialecticised fulfilled (and conversely unfulfilled) being were interpreted non-dualistically as evidence of human co-presence and ground-state (and our disconnection from them in conditions of ill-being). The consequence of what is effectively the spiritualisation of CR eudemonia is to posit reality as pervaded by spirituality and transcendent meaning. Accordingly, Bhaskar makes the ambitious claim that: '[T]he philosophical discourse of a re-enchanted reality, entailed by the new philosophy of Meta-Reality, replaces the philosophical discourse of modernity' (Bhaskar 2002a: 242). As we have seen, the latter is marked by the denial of such meaning. In the language of PMR, its immersion in duality and the demi-real results in a disenchanted view of reality and resultant truncation of rational discourse.

The rethinking of CR themes in light of PMR, then, is intended to perform the ambitious and difficult task of re-enchantment. We have seen how Bhaskar's immanent critique reinterprets each of the five phases of depth realism that CR represents (MELDA) in terms of their contribution to non-duality and that, at 5A, the crucial components of spirituality and transcendence are incorporated into the system. And as a profoundly dialectical process, immanent critique affects a dialectical preservative sublation, whereby demi-reality is qualitatively transcended, yet preserved within the new conception of metaReality. The stages are crucial, because they strongly suggest that CR can now be utilised in the critique of secular disenchantment. Each phase, seen through the lens of PMR, represents a critique of five key moments in the history of modernity's crusade to disenchant the world that Bhaskar identifies. He calls the entire process the *philosophical discourse of modernity* (hereafter PDM) (Bhaskar 2002a: 165). It seems that this period of history (starting from the revolutionary upheavals in seventeenth-century England and culminating in the post-9/11 era that we now endure) is characterised by a discourse of inclusivity-exclusivity expressed in terms of a sharp ego-non-ego dichotomy in some configuration or other. This is crucial to the sustenance of demi-reality, since the ego – the inclusive – is set against that which is excluded – the non-ego, establishing a fundamental and rigid duality. The pathologies that are symptoms of this duality are uncovered at each stage of CR's development from TR to TDCR.

We know that TR/1M reveals layers of depth unseen by experience and empiricist philosophies of science of the early modern period heralded by positing intransitivity and depth, including four-planar social being (Bhaskar 2002a: 243–244). This is the critique of what Bhaskar calls *classical modernism* (hereafter CM) (1640–1789) (Bhaskar 2002a: 26–27, 118, 168–169, 243–244),

including liberalism's false/abstract universality centred on the ego-non-ego dichotomy. In the last chapter, we saw that empiricism's dissolution of ontology leads to the occlusion of dimensions of real being. The truncation of rationality that CM consequently heralds for PDM – which will remain a key aspect of it throughout its subsequent phases – is a key feature of its contribution to disenchantment, because the aspects of being that are invisible to or "transcend" induction or deduction include the subject matter of EN/DEN. And we know that PMR deepens these categories by identifying them with transcendent spirituality. The non-ego is seen to dwell in such non-existent dimensions and is dismissed as the so-called "pre-modern" condition, which includes all forms of religion – i.e. all those who are have been deemed as failing to adhere to CM's concept of the judgementally rational. The ego, against which the pre-modern is contrasted, is conversely a progressive force, because it is wedded to CM's agenda. This is the rational, isolated individual and the rationally constructed society embodied in the nation state (e.g. Hobbesian and Kantian social contract liberalism). This is also replicated in the treatment of nature in terms of the non-ego – a non-rational, disenchanted domain to be treated instrumentally and dominated by the external force of human rationality. As we will see below in my critique of new atheism and liberal (Rawlsian) post-secularism, there are traces of CM rationality and disenchantment at work in both traditions' continued treatment of the religious condition in terms of the non-ego. PMR, by contrast, via CR's depth realism, widens the terms of the rational, enabling us to break the taboo regarding spirituality/transcendence once more. I argue that it is only with the ontology and epistemology of re-enchantment that PMR constructs that we equip ourselves with the necessary tools to build a viable post-secularism.

By virtue of the truncated rationality within which it operates, CM's ego is profoundly *egocentric*. It turns out that its main function is not to uncover a genuine universal human rationality, but rather to serve sectional interests. Duality and disenchantment therefore serve a clear political purpose and so are sources of power<sup>2</sup> relations. CN/2E's defence of the causal efficacy of intentionality and agency represents the critique of this abstract and false universality. This corresponds with *high modernity* (hereafter HM). This historical phase (1848–1917) invoked the concept of ideology to expose CM's partial totality of the ego-non-ego dichotomy and, thus, false universality (e.g. the Marxist critique of CM liberalism) and the master-slave relations that it occludes. HM, therefore, does important work in revealing relations of incomplete totality and lack of reflexivity at the heart of CM (Bhaskar 2002a: 169) that sustain dualistic exploitative conditions. However, much of HM's discourse has been dominated by versions of Marxism that have tended to downplay or deny the reality and causal power of intentionality. The spectres of unilinearity and judgementalism are evident where a rigidly inflexible sense of superiority of the modern condition is asserted and only a single (empiricistic–rationalistic) route to emancipation is endorsed (Bhaskar 2002a: 169). Ironically, in terms of HM's emergence as a critique of CM, it replicates the errors of the latter by treating embodiments of the non-ego ("unenlightened" non-moderns and nature) instrumentally. Thus, we

have dualistic ontology emerging at this stage, just as it does with CM; with it, we have the reconfiguration of the truncated rationality of the ego-non-ego dichotomy. Once again, we have disenchantment as an unfortunate feature of ontological and epistemological duality, because reality is shorn of meaning and value, this time manifested along vulgar Marxist lines that are characteristic of, for example, Second International Marxism.

CN has therefore been vital in the re-vindication of meaning/value in the social (and natural) world against this narrow truncation of the road to eudemonia. In terms of Marxist theory, there is a return to the humanistic early Marx's conception of freedom as creative/expressive free labour standing in contrast to the misrepresentation of him as scientific, reductionistic and deterministic. We can perhaps understand Bhaskar's attraction to the youthful writings if we consider the following comments about the distinctions between animal and human labour taken from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (EPM)*:

It [the animal] produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.... This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species-life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created.

(Marx 2009: 32 [emphasis in original])

Such comments may correctly be seen to prefigure causally efficacious intentionality expositied by Bhaskar's four-planar social being. And with the application of PMR, through which lens we get a profoundly non-dualistic understanding of the subject-object relation, we get a sense of an implicit ontological monism at work in Marx's youthful materialism. We will, however, recall that I criticised Bhaskar for relying too heavily on the presumption that these writings were fully representative of Marx's mature philosophical position. In Chapter 6, I argue that by the time Marx developed historical materialism, he (and Engels) were committed to not going beyond four-planar social being.<sup>1</sup> We have seen how 2E permits us to grasp emergent intra-acting strata as the creative consciousness of labourers and their object world rhythmically – i.e. as spatio-temporal processes of positivity/presence and negativity/absence. I think that Marx and Engels would not want to progress beyond this stage. But Bhaskar wants CN to function as the groundwork for TIC, through its defence of 'the creative power of thought' (Bhaskar 2002a: 245), to change the world and is, therefore, from his perspective, a crucial element in re-enchanting reality. Just as TR/IM's re-vindication of ontology is crucial to the undermining of disenchantment of CM, so CN/2E's defence of causally efficacious intentionality to affect real change is to the critique of HM.

Thus, via PMR, CN/2E enables us to understand that we 'are involved as totalities in a world which is enchanted in the sense that it is the bearer of values,

of meaning and change' (Bhaskar 2002a: 247). We thereby enter into the orbit of EC/3L and the post-modernist attack on the abstract universality and elitism of HM (Bhaskar 2002a: 235). This occurs via an intervening stage that lasts from the end of the Second World War to the advent of post-modernism itself in the 1960s, which Bhaskar calls simply *modernisation* (Bhaskar 2002a: 167), where HM's elitism (but not its abstract universality) is criticised, especially the vanguardism of Leninism and Stalinism. Its main objective is the realisation of the abstract universalism of the isolated ego in not just the elite, but the rest of humanity. This was to be achieved via the social engineering and welfarism evident in both Soviet and Western systems (Bhaskar 2002a: 32).

Post-modernism, however, attacked both HM's elitism and its abstract universality. This obviously includes the instrumental rationality, commodification, reification and alienation endemic to globalised capitalism and (in a different form) Soviet communism, as well as the concomitant master-slave relations intrinsic to both of them. Post-modernism is effective in exposing modernity's destruction of geo-historically situated identity and difference. When we confront the reality of a structured, differentiated and changing world wherein human activity is grasped in terms of four-planar social being (that includes causally efficacious meaning/intentions), it becomes incumbent on us to 'situate ... a generalised hermeneutics or way of reading/seeing and semiotics or way of producing and communicating meaning ... in the world' (Bhaskar 2002a: 248). This heralds a critique of HM's repression of identities and differences and the rise of the so-called new social movements of the 1960s (Bhaskar 2002a: 171).

We should not, however, mistake post-modernism's re-vindication of meaning as a contribution to re-enchantment. Its critique of HM is at the cost of its own contribution to disenchantment – the loss of humanity's sense of inter-connectivity, dialectical totalisation and judgemental rationality. EC/3L, with its concepts of holistic causality, totality, sub-totality and intra-relatedness, and intra-connectivity – energised dialectically – has, for many years, undertaken important work in the critique of this detotalisation. It is in this sense that the Bhaskar of the spiritual turn invites us to think of EC/3L as prefiguring enchantment, precisely because, contra HM, it defends EN and attacks the truncated rationality of the abstract ego; and, contra post-modernism, it defends totalisation and opposes the complete dissolution of judgemental rationality. In other words, its major contribution is to do the important groundwork in criticising their respective disenchantments – the dissolution of meaning into abstract/actualist universality and the dissolution of universality into meaning. Under the lens of non-duality, PMR invites us to think of *dialectical totalisation* – the dialectical critique of actualist universality that preserves totality. It does this in terms of co-presence, which is informed by grasping our ground-state and sensing the cosmic envelope – i.e. in terms of the re-enchantment of totality. And so while EC/3L uncover both the utility of the post-modernist critique of HM elitism, as well as the ways in which its emancipative potential is severely limited in its complete loss of universality and connectivity, PMR deepens this critical

discourse by conceiving retotalisation of difference in terms of the unifying transcendent categories of co-presence, ground-state and the cosmic envelope.

Absenting detotalisation requires, as we have seen, DCR/4D transformative praxis – i.e. human agency occurring within four-planar social being. Again, through the lens of PMR, this dialecticised TMSA is energised not by absenting constraints on immanent embodied species-being, but rather by social agents' identification with their ground-states – i.e. through spiritual enlightenment. And so just as transformative praxis is lauded as the 'mechanism at the core of critical naturalism' (Bhaskar 1993: 152–153) for achieving fulfilled being (retotalisation); in *DPF*, it is the mechanism that heralds the re-enchantment of society in the metaReality books. As we saw in the last chapter, emancipation here is the freedom from demi-reality, rather than the freedom of our immanent species' powers. Despite his denial, it seems that Bhaskar is committed to a more or less straightforward voluntarism. Transformative praxis is transformed by placing fewer onuses on collective political and socio-economic action to absent structures of oppression (e.g. capitalist production relations and superstructural forms) and more on so-called spiritual activities of prayer, meditation and self-reflection as the means by which to get rid of capitalism, whereby we get in touch with our transcendental selves. As we saw in the last chapter, oppressive conditions, by virtue of their demi-reality, are not to be grasped in terms of materially embodied real structures that can be analysed as concrete and objectively real products of given socio-historical-economic conditions, but are merely manifestations of delusional states of mind. The spectre of voluntarism that the pre-spiritual Bhaskar had made such significant progress in banishing appears to be rearing its head once more. As we saw in the last chapter, eudemonia is realised by an act of free will, self-enlightenment and a return to the transcendental self. Furthermore, as Bhaskar tells us, this starts with the individual, since 'individual self-realisation is the only route to universal self-realisation' (Bhaskar 2002a: 238). And it is our sense of co-presence, rather than our socialised material species nature, that grounds individual intentional agency in transformative social activity.

### **Non-duality and practical mysticism**

A sense of this can be seen in his principle of self-realisation. To say that my emancipation entails genuinely universal emancipation for all is to invoke a *practical mysticism*, whereby self-realisation is 'materially embodied, practically engaged and socially realised' (Bhaskar 2002a: 221). This enables us to see how duality has hamstrung traditional political discourses. On the one hand, emancipative theories have been retarded by the occlusion of spiritualistic presuppositions of their core principles. I had always taken the pre-spiritual Bhaskar to conceive of this critique along fairly secular lines, which brought CR/DCR into the orbit of critical theory (despite his powerful discrediting of the anti-naturalism of the latter's prominent exponents, such as Habermas). PMR now infuses this with a critique of liberalism's dualistic core, whereby its narrow and

abstract individualism is seen as predicated on a demi-real isolation of the individual from his/her relations of co-presence with others. To be sure, as embodied individuals, human agents must act *as* individuals (what Bhaskar refers to as the reality of *concrete singularities* in the material world, despite non-duality) – the self-realisation of the individual is the prerequisite of universal self-realisation. However, ‘individual self-realisation without a commitment to universal self-realisation is a misnomer and in fact incoherent, if not indeed logically impossible’ (Bhaskar 2002a: 238). Yet again, the mantra from the *Manifesto* is evident here.

On the other hand, even theories which have exposed the oppressive relations underpinning liberalism have suffered from the strictures of demi-reality. We have in mind critical theory (including CR) here, which, in the secularist orbit in which it has traditionally moved, has occluded its deeper spiritualistic presuppositions. Emancipative agency characteristic of 4D is thus to be combined with such resources as those provided by PMR “deepening”, so that social and political theorists (among others) may grasp the spiritualistic presuppositions that alienating and oppressive social structures are parasitic upon and which energise eudemonistic struggles.

From my own point of view, Bhaskar does indeed make an important contribution to helping us unmask these presuppositions. But I am troubled by the voluntarism that his PMR appears to require. One of my main ambitions in this book is to suggest that voluntarism may not be an inevitable consequence of transcendence. Ernst Bloch has attempted to reconcile meta-utopianism with praxis in such a way as to avoid the imposition of voluntarist themes. I will argue in [Chapter 6](#) that this is made possible because his transcendent is future-oriented. Meta-utopia is a stratum of reality that is contained within the material present (the “Now”) as a (possible) future trajectory of matter, rather than a pre-existent underlying base stratum. This is Bloch’s ontology of Hope, where the metaReal is an emergent property of matter. What Bhaskar calls the demi-real is not parasitic upon the base stratum of co-presence, but the terrain on which metaReality is itself constructed and from which it emerges. We will see that according to this approach, the creative input of human labour activity is of central importance in bringing into existence this concrete utopian potential. This seeks to preserve Marx’s crucial intervention against voluntarism without having to renounce the ambitions of transcendental philosophy.

Despite these problems for Bhaskar, non-duality helps us expose the failures of processes of secularisation (PDM) to live up to the standards of their own normative values. I will expand on this in a moment in the context of my critique of new atheism and Rawlsian liberalism. But of equal importance is the ground work it performs for a critique of philosophies that have sought to hold back the tide of secularism. I am thinking here primarily of recent scholarship that has chosen to approach post-secularism using traditional (especially theistic) definitions of transcendence and spirituality. I have in mind the writings of Charles Taylor. We will see that a non-dualistic definition of transcendence is not only ontologically and epistemologically more robust, but just as with secularism,

Taylor's defence of theism has some rather unfortunate political consequences. That is, the resources of transcendence that have traditionally been devoted to perpetuating a dichotomous prioritisation of achieving eudemonia in an other-worldly "beyond" (as is typical of theism) are, when applied non-dualistically, devoted to its necessary immanent realisation.

It might be instructive, therefore, to explain the purpose of PMR in the following way. On the one hand, the rehabilitation of judgemental rationality of transcendence is meant to, as the result of thinking non-dualistically, redirect the intellectual resources of transcendence (such as that of traditional theism and TDCR) to the task of implementing its ideals concretely and practically in the social and political world of the here and now. In this way, PMR calls for a *practical mysticism*. This will bring us into the orbit of Hegelian panentheism and, ultimately, Blochean process materialism, as we will see in later chapters. On the other hand, it seeks to reacquaint revolutionary struggles of the Left (including the radical critique of oppressive social structures so deftly uncovered by CR/DCR) with a sense of the spiritual and transcendent presuppositions of its own discourses. In this sense, PMR calls for a practical *mysticism*. We have, in short, a 'synthesis of self-realisation [which] turns on understanding the consistency and mutual entailment of deep spirituality and commitment to secular projects of emancipation' (Bhaskar 2002a: 241). I think this is what Bhaskar means when he says that thinking and acting non-dualistically can only 'transform our understanding of both politics and religion' (Bhaskar 2002a: 238).

PMR's challenge to philosophical discourses of modernity/post-modernity and their attendant processes of disenchantment cannot be underestimated, because it represents a powerful critique of what I am going to call the *mainline secular thesis* (hereafter MST). I will argue that in this tradition, the dualistic ego-non-ego dichotomy is manifested in terms of the rationality–irrationality of secularism and transcendence/spirituality respectively. The main representatives of MST will be considered in turn – new atheism, liberalism and Durkheimianism.

### **Mainline Secular Thesis I: new atheism<sup>2</sup>**

We have seen in the last chapter how the TDCR deepening of CR that is represented by the Fifth Aspect (5A) involved the extension of what is deemed judgementally rational to the domain of the spiritual and transcendent. In other words, it has become intellectually respectable to once again speak of a dimension or level of reality that goes beyond the limits of experience in the immediate material world to something real that eludes direct scientific (or demi-real) description. We have seen in his attempts to rethink the first four phases of CR (MELD) in light of PMR that this does not diminish the role of science in improving or deepening our knowledge of the world. In each of these phases, philosophy has performed an under-labouring capacity in making philosophical deductions about the nature of being at each level on the basis of the scientific evidence. To be sure, the spiritual turn does represent the end of this

under-labouring role. The “depth reality” it seeks to uncover is such that CR is taken beyond the realm of natural science, just as it is taken beyond human history and society, in the search for the key substratum underlying and nourishing the world. Again, I have problems with this and think that this disconnection of transcendence from its under-labouring role is unnecessary and harmful. But for now, it is sufficient to note that under the auspices of PMR, ontological transcendence is re-vindicated, because by virtue of its contribution to depth realism it is placed within the orbit of CR judgemental rationality.

MST, however, advances the opposite thesis – that transcendence cannot or cannot any longer be rationally defended. This, it seems to me, is the manifestation of PDM’s ego-non-ego dichotomy in terms of the secularist exclusion of the religious on the grounds of the apparent non-rationality (or even irrationality) of the latter. In particular, new atheism is little more than a reassertion of the key aspects of PDM in general and CM in particular. We will examine some of the damaging consequences of this dichotomy in a moment, but it is instructive to rehearse in brief some of its main arguments in defence of scientism and anti-religion.

We have seen that CM is predicated on the supposed triumph of empiricism and scientism and the resultant decline in religion’s role in offering a credible route to knowledge. It is true that religion does not have the same hold on humanity as it once did. The period from 1500 to the present has seen a significant decline in the power of metaphysical systems sustained by religious thinking. And yet despite the dominance of PDM in general, it remains an important fact that religion is still a live option for a great many people in the Western world (not to mention its even greater presence in other parts of the globe). A popular way around the seeming paradox of religion’s simultaneous decline and popularity is to simply lament the appeal of its truth claims in the modern Western age. This is characteristic of the militant secularism advanced by the new atheists, who have enjoyed a very public profile and renewed confidence in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks in 2001. This is a movement of intellectuals from a variety of disciplines, both academic and journalistic, who think that religion is not only factually in error in the fundamental truth claims it advances, but that it is immoral and even a threat to the long-term well-being of the species. They note how the scourge of militant Islam (or indeed any militant expression of faith) is actually a by-product of necessary doctrinal features of the scriptures, rather than, as most commentators believe, a grotesque aberration of religious doctrine. Its prominent figures are Richard Dawkins (1988, 1989, 1998, 2006), Daniel Dennett (1996), Victor Stenger (2007), Christopher Hitchens (2007) and Sam Harris (2006). Although their main polemic takes the form of an attack on the (as they see it) negative consequences of religious practices and beliefs, their confidence in atheism owes to a virulent attack on the ontology and epistemology of transcendence. Although transcendence does not necessarily involve a commitment to the existence of an immaterial or spiritual realm as such, the utilisation of transcendent thinking is usually the basis of religion’s claim to uncover knowledge, certainly when considering the Abrahamic faiths of

monotheism. For the new atheists, transcendence involves speculative extrapolations from scripture about the world and universe, which is based on an extremely dubious and speculative assumption about the divine inspiration of these texts. Transcendence can also involve, for them, equally speculative pronouncements based on an unwarranted embellishment of the body of current scientific evidence – a discipline known as natural theology. There are prominent theologians – such as Alister McGrath (2004, 2005, 2008, 2009) – who have responded to the challenge of the new atheists by reclaiming scientific reason for theological purposes. By contrast, the new atheists point to the virtues of ontological and epistemological *materialism*; for them, this has usually taken the form of a positivist philosophy of science. The idea is that the resultant belief systems are superior to religiously informed ones, because they, unlike the latter, have survived inductive scientific attempts to falsify them. Hypotheses that survive these rigorous epistemic processes have the right to be accepted as truths, at least provisionally. It is the evidential basis of ontological materialism that gives it its explanatory power. By contrast, arguments that support the God Hypothesis, even though many of them are sincere attempts to engage with the sciences, have managed little or no evidential corroboration. And as a result of our tendency to embrace ontological materialism, we have been rewarded, the new atheists claim, with powerful and compelling truths about the world and universe that are infinitely more revelatory than anything that can be found in scripture (Dawkins 1998; Hitchens 2007: 73–96, 139–153).

Given the explanatory superiority of materialism advanced here, the argument that religious consciousness is explained by our experience of some divine cosmic super-subject must be mistaken. Such an argument is an important feature of the God Hypothesis, especially theistic variants of it. Religion persists, the extent to which people remain impressed by its false doctrines. Explanatory primacy for the phenomenon must be placed in the power of transcendent beliefs to animate people to behave religiously. Those who question transcendence just happen to think that those beliefs are manifestly wrong. It is an issue of the epistemological weakness of religion and the epistemological strength of the scientific and technological age.

Charles Taylor has observed that this is a view that is particularly evident within Western academia (Taylor 2007: 428–429) and especially the social sciences. It is the evidential basis of immanence, so the argument goes, that gives it its explanatory power. Its findings are not corrupted by the desire for purpose and meaning in life. Immanence is a mindset that is free from the arrogant human tendency to seek some kind of cosmic supernatural significance for our existence and the desire to transcend our material condition (Hitchens 2007: 74). And it is not just in the area of the natural world that science exposes the absurdity of religion, according to this account. The application of immanence to the search for important truths about our social selves has had equally devastating consequences for religion in this area as well. Many moral and ethical principles to be found in scripture have been exposed as both primitive, irrational and, in some cases, downright offensive to our modern pluralistic and tolerant secular age.

Sam Harris' position is typical of this sort of anti-religious logic. In his book *The End of Faith* (2006), he argues that the decline in scriptural literalism (the belief that sacred religious texts should be taken literally) over the past several hundred years is a direct result of the rise of science and modernity. Advances in scientific knowledge have effectively disproved things that were previously taken as self-evidently true. The most obvious example is the biblical account of Creation. Faced with evidence that the Earth was not, in fact, created in six days some 4,000–10,000 years ago, but instead is some 4.5 billion years old and that biological life has evolved over hundreds of millions of years, most theologians now claim that the Genesis account is not literally true. But its explanatory power remains, due to its symbolic significance: it symbolises the Divine Hand that was at work in creating a world and universe that we now understand as vast in both spatial and temporal terms. Harris himself uses the example of how traditional explanations for illness have had to acquiesce to the marvels of modern medical science: nowadays, most religious people do not explain disease as the result of sin or demonic possession, but as the result of physiological pathologies (Harris 2006: 19). His point is that this shift in the mindset of people of faith is not the result of changes within their religious worldviews. Instead, Harris contends that the rise of what he calls "moderate" religion (i.e. interpretations of scripture that seek to make them compatible with the current body of scientific and moralistic knowledge) is the result of religion being dragged almost kicking and screaming into the modern world:

The only reason anyone is 'moderate' in matters of faith these days is that he has assimilated some of the fruits of the last two thousand years of human thought (democratic politics, scientific advancement on every front, concern for human rights, and an end to cultural and geographic isolation, etc.). The doors leading out of scriptural literalism do not open from the *inside*. The moderation we see among nonfundamentalists is not some sign that faith itself has evolved; it is, rather, the product of the many hammer blows of modernity that have exposed certain tenets of faith to doubt.

(Harris 2006: 18–19 [emphasis in original])

So the rise of moderate religion is not evidence of any internal progressive logic, but is the result of pressure on transcendent forms of thought, such as religion, from purely immanent and materialist worldviews. We can see this view represented in mainstream academia as well. Rudolph Bultmann, for example, suggests a basic incompatibility between scientific epistemology in the contemporary world and a belief in the supernatural when he says that '[w]e cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medial and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder of the New Testament' (Bultmann 1984: 4). And then there is Hugh McLeod, who quotes approvingly from a Dutch saying: 'Artificial fertilisers make atheists' (McLeod 1992: 61).

Nor does Harris think that we should give much credit to religion for those tenets of faith that have escaped the 'hammer blows modernity'. He argues that

even ‘the “good parts”’<sup>3</sup> are indicative of a dimension to human consciousness that is, as yet, not fully understood by science. In other words, laudable human qualities that can be detected in the scriptures, such as our general preference to seek love rather than hate and order rather than chaos, must be the result of some inadequately grasped truth about the relationship between our mental states and our conduct (Harris 2006: 20). Religion is of use only the extent to which this entirely immanent fact about the human condition is present within it. It certainly cannot be the product of the transcendently oriented religious mindset. Harris seems to think that when we see evidence of ignorance and offensiveness in scripture, it is the result of primitive religious claptrap, but when we detect things of value that need to be nurtured, it is the result of some, as yet, not fully understood inherent conscious mechanisms expressing themselves in the midst of all of this other religious dross.

For Harris, it is patently obvious that there is little of merit in religion. Not only does he dismiss it as primitive and ignorant, he also thinks it is a threat to reason. Here we have a typical example of the definition of the immanence–transcendence relation in terms of simple binary opposites. When faced with the evidence of a vengeful, jealous and wrathful God, people of faith have had little choice but to abandon scriptural literalism in response to the outrage expressed by enlightened people of the secular age at these offensive assaults on human dignity and justice. Instead, most people who wish to continue with their faith have had to ignore certain passages that present God as a bloodthirsty dictator; Harris helpfully quotes at length from the texts of all three monotheistic religions, should they need any help to do so (Harris 2006: 117–123, 155). Moderate Christians, Jews and Muslims have had no choice but to either ignore or employ a creative degree of verbal gymnastics to deal with these hateful texts. Richard Dawkins, in his hugely popular book *The God Delusion* (2006), insists that it is impossible for the people of civilised modernity to acquire any morals from the God of the Old Testament (Dawkins 2006: 237–250). Christopher Hitchens has drawn our attention to the horrors and nightmares of these scriptures (Hitchens 2007: 97–137) and even suggests that the “meek and mild” New Testament is constructed on even shakier ethical foundations than the Hebrew Bible (Hitchens 2007: 121–122). Dawkins, for his part, draws attention to Christianity’s adoption of an instrument of ancient sadomasochistic torture and execution (the cross) as its sacred symbol – a barbarity that surpasses even the Hebrew texts (Dawkins 2006: 251).

Such is the basic thrust of the new atheist position. As I have said above, I wish to place these, at times intemperate, interjections about religion into the context of PDM in general and CM’s rationality–irrationality dichotomy of the ego-non-ego. New atheism operates with a concept of the rational, secular and atheistic ego of the radical Enlightenment set in contrast to what they regard as the irrational, superstitious, delusional and potentially dangerous non-ego of the pre-modern individual. But perhaps the most important question is why now? Why is new atheism making such an impact at this stage in our history? The obvious answer is that it is a response to the rise of extremist religion.

We have already seen how most of the polemic of the new atheists is directed at convincing us that fundamentalism is not some aberration of religious doctrine, but rather is a set of twisted ideas that are fully consistent with core religious teachings. It is the moderates who have strayed from the essentials of the faith by allowing themselves to be influenced by moderating influences of modernity.

This point about modernity is vital. Fundamentalism is quite obviously driven by the crisis of meaning of late modernity. But so is new atheism or so I would argue. A return to pre-modernist religious doctrine is a common response to the challenges faced by PDM's erosion of meaning and post-modernism's dissolution of universality. We have seen above how the clearest manifestation of the loss of meaning has been MST. Loss of meaning leads to moral decay and social disintegration for fundamentalist thinkers.<sup>4</sup> The solution is to declare the failure of secularism and a perfunctory reassertion of old religious certainties – biblical inerrancy and literalism, creationist “science” and the like. New atheism is best understood, I think, as an aggressive reassertion of the worst excess of MST – scientism – in direct response to this challenge, on the one hand, and the post-modernist anti-universality, on the other. Paradoxically, this means that both movements embrace epistemological absolutism and a resultant ego-non-ego dichotomy. This can be expressed by Richard Bernstein's famous *Cartesian anxiety* (Bernstein 1983: 18). Both movements operate from the default epistemological position that either we have certain foundations of knowledge (biblical inerrancy or science) or we descend into social and moral chaos. Both seek an authoritative foundation for normative order. For the new atheists, this is the epistemological certainties of CM to which all truth claims – including religious – are to be subjected. This lies behind Dawkins' *God Hypothesis*, according to which the fundamental claims of monotheism about reality are scientific hypotheses that are provable or disprovable, just like any other scientific theory (Dawkins 2006: 50). In his book *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, Stenger echoes this by appropriating Karl Popper's demarcation theory. He argues that

the gods are human inventions based on human concepts. Whether or not we can say that if the gods people talk about have anything to do with what objective reality is out there depends on the empirical success of the models that are built around these hypothetical entities.

(Stenger 2007: 39)

That this hypothesis has manifestly failed, it follows that beliefs based on it are delusional. Indeed, given that this is so, any moral framework will be poisonous and dangerous. The only way to shore up the normative order is to embrace the epistemic certainties of CM. Fundamentalism paradoxically bases its converse attacks on atheism and secularism by using the same logic – the moment that we question the foundations of our certainty (biblical inerrancy), the floodgates of moral chaos and disorder are opened. The character of their respective ego-non-ego dichotomy can be explained in these terms – the ego is the bastion of

epistemological certainty fighting against the non-ego's eagerness to usher in the age of delusional beliefs and moral decay.

As William Stahl has shown, by becoming embroiled in the quest for absolute certainty, new atheism (like fundamentalism) inevitably falls short of its own epistemological standards. He notes that, in particular, Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens display a shockingly poor level of scientific inquiry (Stahl 2010: 103–104) and are accordingly hamstrung by a Habermasian *performative contradiction* – claims to certainty are undercut by an inability to maintain their own epistemic standards (Stahl 2010: 104).<sup>5</sup> The group is therefore, in truth, maintained less by intellectual rigour and coherence and more by a Nietzschean “will to power”. As I indicated above, new atheist egocentrism has detotalising effects by sustaining power<sup>2</sup> relations. This explains why its adherents remain ensnared in a perpetual state of conflict with almost all social, political and philosophical traditions. It also explains its alliance with Anglo-American political neo-conservatism. Hitchens and Harris may be justifiably said to be the most politically oriented of the movement. Both explicitly ally themselves with American imperialism and colonialism and declare that the West is at war with Islam.<sup>6</sup>

My main point in all of this is that new atheism shares a paradoxical affinity with fundamentalism, because both movements are detotalising manifestations of disenchantment. While the latter's recent resurgence as a reaction to secular and liberal post-war culture is well documented,<sup>7</sup> it may be the case that the former is also best grasped as a pathology of disenchantment. Stahl suggests that new atheism may be particularly irked by the rise of post-modern culture when he says that

social and intellectual fragmentation has relativized all belief systems – none can assure authority when all are ‘just beliefs’.... New Atheism [is an] attempt to recreate and impose belief as a form of external authority. Behind their rage is a fear of losing control.

(Stahl 2010: 107)

So, new atheism may be a reassertion of PDM's universality in the form of a return to CM empiricist and rationalist egocentrism. It is a powerful example of how post-modernism's attempt to reassert meaning against modernity without a coherent conception of universality leaves itself open to attack from those who insist that external forms of authority (in this case epistemic) are vital bulwarks against descent into an unreflective cultural relativism. Although fundamentalism is also a rejection of this relativisation process, the dissolution of rigorous standards of rationality has often given succour to ideas that would otherwise be discredited. The fear that lies behind new atheism is the threat to their radical Enlightenment dream of a secular rational utopia posed by the post-modernist undercutting of external authority (including political methods of control and punishment for the non-egos). Their answer is an uncompromising defence of MST from a scientistic perspective.

## Mainline Secular Thesis II: liberalism

Rather than taking the new atheist tack of seeing religion as a threat to humanity's well-being, John Rawls (1993) has sought to distinguish between possible grounds for judging religious or, indeed, any belief to be reasonable or tolerable and its truth claims as such. That is, there is a distinction between the rationality of a belief and its reasonableness. For Rawls, the latter is exclusively concerned with the capacity of a belief to engage in fair-minded social co-operation with competing sets of beliefs (Rawls 1993: 51). This is known as *public reasonableness* or as Rawls says: '[t]he reasonable is an element of the idea of society as a system of fair cooperation and that its fair terms be reasonable for all to accept is part of its idea of reciprocity' (Rawls 1993: 49–50). It is based on Kant's distinction between the pure practical reason of his categorical imperative and the empirical practical reason of his hypothetical imperative. Applied to the political conception of justice, the former makes it incumbent on citizens to subject themselves to 'a principle from which they and others can reason in common' (Rawls 1993: 49, fn.1). Thus, even though empirical practical reason is the basis of people's pursuit of their own ends in an intelligent way, they do so within the parameters of common reasoning, which includes an awareness of the consequences of the pursuit of their rationality on others' well-being.

This distinction is also the basis for deciding what beliefs are deemed worthy of public recognition and which should be tolerated and respected but remain the preserve of private citizens (Rawls 1993: 53–54). The criterion of admission to the former is the condition that a belief is sufficiently uncontroversial that it can be publically accepted. The criterion of the latter is simply the extent to which adherents to a belief are prepared to respect other views with which they might not agree for the sake of a stable and democratic public sphere. And so the best way to deal with the thorny issue of the place of religion in modern society is to insist that the truth of any epistemology is to be judged on its capacity to generate reasons for general public agreement. Liberals point out that this is the means of securing respect and toleration for religious belief, even though they are incapable of commanding sufficient public support to grant their truth claims full recognition in the public sphere. The social legitimacy of faith exists only as far as those who hold to it are prepared to recognise and respect the co-existence of competing worldviews. Religion is defensible in that it has demonstrated its capacity to be a key player in the inherently pluralistic liberal society in which we live. Although the nature of religious faith means that its truth claims cannot be publically shared, its adherents' ability to accept public reasonableness accords it both respect and tolerance. The issue therefore becomes not so much the truth or falsity of religious ontology, but its capacity to adhere to normative sociological and political principles. Presumably, on Rawls' criterion, the new atheist position would also be excluded on the grounds that its intemperate attacks on religion are not sufficiently uncontroversial either.

My problem with Rawls on this issue is not that he makes certain presumptions about the epistemological and ontological weaknesses of religious systems

of thought in his claim that they cannot command sufficient public support. Rather, it is that he rests this contention on foundations that are themselves highly ontologically and epistemologically suspect in that they undermine transcendence. That is, his polemic rests on a basic acceptance of PDM and disenchantment. Despite the undoubted protection for religious rights that his theory entails, the cost is that truth effectively becomes a function of public standards of reasonableness. His defence of this is that failure to rationally agree is an inevitable consequence of the genuine freedoms that liberal society grants us (Rawls 1993: 58). What he calls *reasonable pluralism* refers to the emergence of ‘a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines ... [that is] ... doctrines that reasonable citizens affirm.... [T]hey are part of the work of free practical reason within the framework of free institutions’ (Rawls 1993: 36–37). Such pluralism is seen as ‘the inevitable outcome of free human reason’ (Rawls 1993: 37) – in short, a welcome feature of a liberal democratic society. And so conversely, general public agreement on issues of comprehensive doctrine should be seen as, more often than not, the result of the exercise of power, rather than free discussion. Although one can acknowledge the efforts being undertaken here to protect us from recreating oppressive social conditions, I cannot help feeling rather uneasy about Rawls’ questionable approach to epistemological matters. To effectively reduce truth to a matter of public reasonableness in itself is problematic, because it involves the dissolution of the reality that beliefs are supposed to be about to political democratic processes. This places us in the territory of what philosophical realists call subjectivism, deontologicisation of the world and the epistemic and anthropic fallacies. Rawls expresses this dissolution in his notion of an *overlapping consensus* that is a necessary aspect of public reasonableness (Rawls 1993: 43). The consensus does not consist of an attempt to strike a balance between prevalent rational doctrines so as to give as much public political representation to their competing truth claims as possible. Rather, ‘it elaborates a political conception as a freestanding view working from the fundamental idea of society as a fair system of cooperation and its companion ideas’ (Rawls 1993: 40). In the process of securing a stable consensus, the comprehensive doctrines and their conception of the good are left aside in favour of a freestanding conception of justice ‘presupposing no particular doctrine’ (Rawls 1993: 40).

I want to suggest, however, that the epistemological neutrality that we are supposed to gain from this dissolution of truth is highly questionable, not only on the grounds of the subjectivistic errors it involves, but as it is itself of dubious credentials. We are supposed to believe that, for Rawls, pluralism is a natural and welcome feature of our free use of reason. In other words, under the influence of liberal democratic political institutions, there is an inherent limitation on what our powers of reasoning can reveal about the real objective world. Fallibilistic doctrine seems to be the inevitable and permanent state of affairs. However, as Roger Trigg (1998) has demonstrated effectively, this principled position appears somewhat shakier when Rawls considers the form of knowledge that is perhaps most often cited as one of the triumphs of unfettered reason – namely, the natural sciences. Rawls thinks that science is unlike other forms of

knowledge in that reasoned interaction between people can often lead to reasoned agreement (Rawls 1993: 55). If we were to apply Rawls' logic consistently here, then we would conclude that its success in securing agreement in the public sphere owes, in accordance with fallibilism, to the contingency of its public acceptance in our particular Western society. It certainly cannot be because of its epistemological superiority over other belief systems, because fallibilism disallows this on principle. But Trigg is rightly suspicious here, because nowhere in Rawls' writings does he suggest that science should be, in any society, merely the preserve of private citizens or social organisations (Trigg 1998: 14). Rather, the suspicion should be that scientific truth claims adhere to this criterion because of the character of their epistemic methodology and it is for this reason that they have standards that can be accepted by everyone and are therefore largely uncontroversial.

Once we penetrate beneath the veneer of neutrality, we see the egocentrism of CM at work that is sustained by ontological dualism and disenchantment. One detects in Rawls an awareness of the narrow rationality of the isolated ego. The doctrine of fallibilism and public reasonableness seems to me to be a rather awkward and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deal with the power<sup>2</sup> relations that we have already seen can result from working with such a truncated conception of the rational. This is because lurking behind the principle of reasonable pluralism is a default scepticism regarding the credence of transcendence that is characteristic of PDM. Therefore, Rawls seems to be guilty of the epistemic fallacy on two counts. On the one hand, reasonable pluralism rests on the dissolution of truth into the rules of public agreement and, on the other, the fallibilist doctrine upon which this is supposed to rest is itself vulnerable to an epistemic double standard when it comes to considering the merits of science, as compared to those beliefs sustained via transcendence. The fallibilist bedrock upon which the principle of reasonable pluralism appears to have been exposed as a mere smokescreen to conceal an underlying commitment to MST and thus to the empirical and anthropic realism characteristic of empiricism. In terms of the rules of political procedure, Rawls seems to demand that the religious perform a kind of spiritual lobotomy once they enter the public arena. And in terms of epistemology, his thinking presupposes an empiricism that is the motor force of mainline secularism. The reasonableness of religion is preserved, but at the expense of demoting the "aboutness" (i.e. the rationality) of the religious experience to the status of a private matter. This is so even if he rejects the new atheist claim that religion is incapable of adhering to the doctrine of public reasonableness.

By contrast, the meta-post-secularism that I am defending does not demand such a high price from the faithful. This approach respects the explanatory significance of extra-scientific (transcendent) modes of knowledge that can be found in a wide range of views from those that endorse the God Hypothesis to those that ultimately reject it, but wish to retain some form of transcendence. Indeed, as regards the latter group, we will see that failure to be convinced by arguments for the existence of God does not necessarily detract from the

importance of immersing oneself in the theological truths that remain and are served up via a deep appreciation of transcendence. Bloch, as we will see, represents an atheistic approach to meta-post-secularism as the attempt to re-engage with and rehabilitate key aspects of the rationality (and not just the public reasonableness) of religion in the epistemology of transcendence. I believe that such an approach is more likely to secure the prolonged interest of religious people than Rawls' approach, which remains ensnared in precisely the discourses of disenchantment and duality upon which narrow secularist rationalism was nourished in the first place.

I wish to turn now to the third dimension of MST that can be found in many sociological and anthropological studies of religion typical of Durkheim. It seems that if Rawls is guilty of dissolving the truth claims of religion into matters of political public agreement in the service of a repackaged CM, then this school dissolves them into that which can be sociologically or anthropologically apprehended.

### **Mainline Secular Thesis III: sociological/anthropological reductionism**

Proponents of this approach may immediately point out that their discipline requires that they treat religious belief and institutions as social or anthropological facts. Rather than presuming that religious epistemology is untenable and embracing a default implicit atheism, they adopt a methodological agnosticism, because they are interested in the sociological or anthropological effects of religion, rather than its underlying truth claims. In this way they can, like the liberals' political reductionism, sidestep awkward metaphysical questions about religion that the new atheists like to get involved in. The issue of the epistemological strength or weakness of religion becomes removed from the agenda. This is a tempting position to take for many (not least some people of faith themselves), because it insulates religion from getting into messy debates with other competing epistemologies, not least science. But it seems to me that this is a curious way for the religious to approach the issue. In denying primacy to religion's truth claims, what religion is supposed to be about instantly dissolves and all we are left with are its more empirically measurable effects, such as identity and community formation. I find it hard to see how this protects religion from opposing truth claims, because it does away with its own before battle can even commence. This is, of course, less of a problem for sociologists and anthropologists who are not impressed by transcendence. But I find it hard to understand why it is a popular position for some believers. Moreover, it conceals an unacknowledged presumption about religious epistemology that is absent from other epistemic forms, especially science. Like the liberals, these proponents tend not to apply the same standards of truth to science as they do religion. The former is sustained by the strengths of its own argument to have captured truth. This double standard suggests, to me, an underlying presumption of the falsity of religious truth claims that is masked by placing the explanatory onus on other

areas of the religious phenomenon, just like falsity is masked by liberals through the focus on public reasonableness. These are two, admittedly different, expressions of PDM's scientific rationality. For descriptivism, this is manifested in a double standard where sociologists and anthropologists reduce religion to an epiphenomenon of social or cultural factors, but would never dream of doing the same when studying the sociological or anthropological impacts of the natural sciences. Sociologists of the Durkheimian persuasion, for example, make an explanatory claim about science that is absent from their analysis of religion – namely, that people hold to the former because its truth claims have been empirically demonstrated, whereas the same cannot be said of the latter.

This can be seen in Steve Bruce's discussions. He, along with Roy Wallis, places causal primacy in the secularisation process in urbanisation, industrialisation and rationalisation when they say that 'social differentiation, societalisation and rationalisation generate secularisation...' (Wallis and Bruce 1992: 17). But they immediately augment this adherence to MST by attributing a key sociological function to instances where religion survives this secularisation process. The above quotation continues: '...except where religion finds work to do other than relating to individuals to the supernatural' (Wallis and Bruce 1992: 17). In other words, when religion is sustained purely in terms of belief in the supernatural, it is vulnerable to the forces of modernisation. Accordingly, in cases where it appears not to decline but to thrive in such conditions, it is due not to its power to offer persuasive explanations of things, but in its sociocultural utility. The only significant difference with the new atheists is a more sophisticated awareness of additional factors that must be taken into account when grappling with the process of secularisation. This they do by identifying key functions that religious belief discharges that go beyond belief in supernatural entities or impersonal forces (Wallis and Bruce 1992: 17). Perhaps it helps to sustain cultural or political identities and can bind communities together? Countries such as Ireland and the United States spring to mind here, where sociological or indeed political factors interrelate with religious belief in such a way as to provide continued relevance for the latter in the experiences of a great number of their citizens. We can therefore see that when Bruce enunciates that the religious and the secular refer primarily to modes of belief and action, due to the professed epistemic weakness of religion, explanations for their persistence or decline in the modern age are to be located in processes of social harmonisation or fragmentation. Due to the evident superiority in Bruce's mind of non-religious ideas, the prospect for the continuation or decline of religion becomes a largely sociological or anthropological matter. Religion will be with us so long as it discharges a socio-cultural utility.

As it happens, Bruce posits its decline, because he expects processes of social fragmentation that have become such a feature of the contemporary world to continue (Bruce 2002: 39). It would appear that he feels no reason to get involved in the irreligiosity of the new atheists and regards their polemic as a paradoxical example of the persistence of the religious issue itself. That is, the epistemic superiority of forms of non-belief should not lead us into a battle with

people of faith on the finer points of religious doctrine, but represents the opportunity to transcend the concept of religious faith itself. Accordingly, Bruce looks forward to a post-religious society where religious *indifference*, rather than irreligiosity, prevails. As he argues: ‘an endpoint … would not be a self-conscious irreligion; you have to care too much about religion to be irreligious. It would be widespread indifference…’ (Bruce 2002: 42). What PDM’s disenchantment process has produced is the opportunity to see the religion *itself* as epiphenomenal, irrespective of where one takes a stand on the issue. What the new atheists have failed to recognise on this account is that principled atheism can be linked to matters of sociocultural utility as much as their reverse. An accurate description of Bruce’s position would thus be *post-religious*. It seems that if we were to be content with simply the new atheist position, there is a danger of pushing society into forms reminiscent of the irreligiosity witnessed in the former Soviet Union. I think Bruce would argue that we may call such societies atheist for sure, but we may not call them post-religious.

Despite clear Durkheimian influences, I think Bruce goes beyond Durkheim’s own contention that even modern secular doctrines, which began life as products of a religious framework, but evolved into purely naturalist forms, are epiphenomenon of sociological factors. For example, doctrines such as the rights of man may have been divested of any of their original religious significance and made compatible with atheistic or agnostic discourse, but they nevertheless display evidence of forms of belief characteristic of religion in that they mimic its harmonisation function. Therefore, modes of belief that share important characteristics of religion are *necessary* features of society. But Bruce, for his part, goes beyond Durkheim in the sense that any socially binding doctrine can be divested of these characteristics. He looks forward to a time when no-one is animated by religious matters, be it motivated by a desire to defend or critique belief. Presumably, then, in such a post-religious society, doctrines such as the rights of man will be sustained purely through their compatibility with the truncated rationality of PDM.

## Conclusion

There is empirical realist reductionism at work in both Rawls’ and Bruce’s approach involving the idea that, given that modernity has disenchanted the universe and proven the epistemic weakness of transcendent rationality, we must justify transcendent belief on the criteria of public reasonableness or there must be some other reason why people today still embrace it (and once those other factors decline, so will religion). Reductionism and sociological descriptivism are therefore phenomena of disenchantment. As far as Bruce’s analysis is concerned, I think that this helps explain why transcendent beliefs are seen as epiphenomena of surface causal explanations at the sociocultural level. Although such studies in themselves are not unimportant, their account of the origins and sustenance of religious belief into the modern age is insufficient. In the next chapter, I wish to construct a debate between one powerful broadly Durkheimian

approach to transcendence as found in the work of Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor, who uses critical hermeneutics to defend theistic transcendence. Gauchet belongs in the camp of immanent post-secularists, whereas Taylor is an important defender of what I have called meta-post-secularism.

## Notes

- 1 Indeed, as we will see, there is considerable evidence that Marx moves beyond ontological monism by the time that he (and Engels) formulate historical materialism. The unity achieved between human beings and the material environment is grasped in terms of a wider ontology of nature's externality, therefore placing Marx firmly in the camp of dualism. It is for this reason that I classify historical materialism as immanent post-secularism.
- 2 For an excellent account of an academic critique of the new atheist position from a variety of disciplines, see Amarnath Amarasingam (ed.), *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (2010).
- 3 Presumably, Harris has in mind evidence of toleration, respect, equality and freedom that can be detected in the religious texts here. It is precisely these tenets that form the basis of my definition of secularism in this chapter. As we will see, if Harris were to understand modernity as essentially the secular expression of many religious values such as these, his account of the relationship between transcendence and immanence would be slightly more accurate.
- 4 The best example of this linkage between social pathologies and the ascendency of secular values can be seen within the Islamist thought of Sayed Qutb (2006). For an excellent examination of his philosophy, see Khatab (2006a, 2006b).
- 5 Dawkins, given his background as an evolutionary biologist, has no excuse for poor scientific rigour on this issue. For example, he has been accused of turning Darwinism to the status of a ‘theory of everything’ that is analogous to the religious mindset that ‘God can explain everything’ (Nelkin 2004). This belief in the universal applicability of Darwinism will be discussed in more detail when I look at Daniel Dennett’s theory of “universal acid” in [Chapter 6](#).
- 6 Harris, for example, is quite prepared to use nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive strike against Islamist states (Harris 2006: 219).
- 7 See, for example, Lawrence (1990) and Hedges (2006).

### **3 Transcendent and immanent approaches to the “self”**

Marcel Gauchet and Charles Taylor

In this chapter, I wish to consider two important approaches to the issue of the rationality of transcendence. The first adopts the broadly Durkheimian position of the epiphenomenal status of belief very much akin to Steve Bruce’s approach, which we examined in the last chapter. I am speaking of Marcel Gauchet’s book *The Disenchantment of the World* (1997). His account of how Christianity generated a transcendent-immanent duality that spawned disenchantment is important, even if I disagree with his reductionist and epiphenomenal identification of political factors underlying it. It is important because he effectively charts the emergence of a key category of what we have seen Bhaskar call the demi-real – the rational subject – from its first emergence in monotheistic philosophy through to the impetus for its secularisation in the Cartesian ego. Disenchantment, the narrowing of rationality and the dissolution of transcendence are explained in terms of mutations in conceptions of the self. Gauchet’s analysis fits broadly into our immanent post-secularist category (although, like Rawls and Durkheim, suffers from the paradox of operating with secularist epistemological and ontological premises). The second approach similarly involves a treatment of the self as key to disenchantment, but this time one that involves a *defence* of transcendence. I am speaking of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007). Like Gauchet, he charts the rise of disenchantment, duality and the truncated rationality of modernity as a process that begins from developments within theism. But his defence of transcendence seems more of an attempt to carve out a space for the judgemental rationality of the religious condition within the parameters of disenchantment. He is sympathetic to a grasp of rationality that is predicated on a sharp transcendent-immanent duality that has little in common with the ontological non-duality that I think any defence of transcendent rationality must take. In my own view, disenchantment is to be understood as a force that theism unleashes, but which, as it mutates into MST, it can no longer control. As a result, I do not think that any such dualistic defence of transcendent rationality is convincing, because it is predicated on an ontological dualism that leaves itself vulnerable to secularisation and, via the ego-non-ego duality it presupposes, ultimately, the power<sup>2</sup> relations that we have seen result. If we wish to protect transcendence, we must instead proceed in the PMR direction. Taylor’s narrative of the rise of PDM and disenchantment is, nevertheless, an important context in

which we are to explore issues of duality and monism in relation to the meta-post-secularist category into which he can be placed.

### **Approaches to Transcendence I: Marcel Gauchet**

Gauchet establishes his Durkheimian credentials by defining religion as a socially embedded understanding of the universe as a sacred order. He departs from Durkheim by insisting that it is a *historical* phenomenon (Gauchet 1997: 21–22). We must understand religion as being a constant feature of *society*, rather than an asocial fact of human existence. In fact, Gauchet contends that religion actually functions best when it is reacting against essential ahistorical facts about human beings. In particular, he defines reflection and transformative agency as key intrinsic tendencies in human behaviour that religion has functioned to dispossess us of. For example, the earliest primitive religions were rather efficient at placing humans in an irrevocably fixed spatiotemporal order. In order to eliminate what would otherwise be a relentless search for meaning and purpose with all the negative implications for social order that go along with it, early religions pre-emptively repressed our reflective and transformative tendencies – a process that Gauchet calls “dispossession”. The cohesive social function of primitive religion becomes clear – a fixed world order that was established in an irrecoverable past in relation to which no human individual could stand closer than any other. Religion can therefore be understood as little more than ‘the translation and embodiment of social man’s negative relation to himself into social forms’ (Gauchet 1997: 21). It disguises the insatiable human desire to confront and alter the material reality around us, whether that is nature, our fellow human beings and culture or our own sense of our inner self. By positing *a priori* customary modes of human existence, it functions to foreclose potential antagonisms that are intrinsic to natural and social bonds (Gauchet 1997: 26–27). This transformative agential impulse towards the negation of things that we can perceive as constitutive of human nature and religion is simply the means whereby it is controlled. Here we have what, for Gauchet, is the unmistakable social foundation for religion – it helps us overcome tendencies within ourselves that both condemn us to a tireless search for meaning and threatens social order and harmony.

The crucial point in all of this, for our current purposes, is that these *a priori* customary modes of human behaviour establish, for Gauchet, the explanatory and causal primacy of the collectivism of religious tradition over the personal beliefs of individuals. In other words, from the outset, religion is energised not by an individual’s personal belief that his or her faith is a response to something transcendentally real, but by the way that these beliefs are ‘articulated around a religious hegemony, that is, around the absolute predominance of a founding past, of a sovereign tradition, which predates personal preferences’ (Gauchet 1997: 27). The importance of lived religious experience or any other evidence of the existence of anything transcendent that might be the ultimate cause of the religious impulse is immediately discounted.

With this basic definition in place, Gauchet proceeds to define human history as the process whereby humans have gradually overcome dispossession and attempted to break up this primordial social unity. The impetus<sup>1</sup> for this break up is the emergence of political forms of domination – i.e. the state, which threatens the radical equality of primitive societies, because it ends the diffusion of power amongst their members. Political power is now no longer sustained by unchallengeable customary modes of social behaviour (i.e. primitive religion’s rituals and sacred ceremonies), but by elites whose very nature represents the objective establishment of a debate about the meaning and legitimacy of the social whole (Gauchet 1997: 35). Religion no longer functions to sustain a social order of radical equality, but to legitimise new political elites. Crucially, this means that for Gauchet, the advent of the state creates a tension between the social structure and the religious other, where previously harmony prevailed. In short, the state is the cause of newer forms of religion, which, over a period of about 5,000 years, will lead humanity out of religious belief altogether.

This analysis of the state as the engine of religious change enables Gauchet to approach the issue of religious transcendence that is most interesting. In a moment, we will see how Taylor incorporates treatment of the phenomenon of religious transcendence into his concept of an irreducible religious consciousness. Gauchet’s reductionist account, however, involves the basic idea that it is the emergence of hierarchical social structures that leads to the abandonment of primitive religion’s monistic ontology. This social structure has the effect of highlighting differences between the spiritual and the concrete, thereby making philosophical transcendence possible. The internal workings of this new social structure open up space for theological speculations regarding the now-abstract domain of the spiritual other, thus undermining primitive religion’s unified cosmos. As Gauchet puts it:

[t]he seeds of the separation of the here-below from a beyond, can all be found in the deployment of State order. To all intents and purposes, the other would not materialise into a separate power without being transformed: it carried something that would make its transcendence conceivable.

(Gauchet 1997: 39)

In short, for Gauchet, the state becomes a ‘religion producing enterprise’ (Gauchet 1997: 44), whereby religion, now assuming the guise of transcendent ontologism, is sustained by its social utility.

As we will see shortly, transcendence is an important vehicle towards what Charles Taylor calls a greater concern for *human flourishing* by virtue of the ontological duality it presupposes. This involves the emergence of what Bhaskar would describe as demi-real values and principles characteristic of modernity, such as self-responsible freedom and rational autonomy for the individual. As we will see, the emergence of such ideas within an original framework of religious transcendence is an important basis for Taylor’s central thesis that the

modern self/ego is the site of a re-engagement with religious sources, including those of traditional faiths. Gauchet, however, in accordance with his reductionist approach, identifies a much more state-driven phenomenon at work. Humans are now permitted access to the external divine, whereas before it belonged to the forever inaccessible and irrevocable past. The phenomenon of divine revelation characteristic of monotheism involves the promotion of the transcendent idea that God’s rational purposes are accessible to the human subject. This sets the precedent of human self-sufficiency that Gauchet believes leads to the eventual abandonment of God (Gauchet 1997: 61). Crucially, the dynamic of our obligations to God will, eventually and inexorably, be relocated to the inner consciousness of the individual. While transcendence is the site for a re-engagement of the self with religious tradition for Taylor, it is the dynamic of our final exit from it for Gauchet; but more on Taylor’s thoughts about this in a moment.

For now, we must know that the dynamic of this process is sustained by a paradox that Gauchet believes he has identified. It is of importance for our wider understanding in this chapter of Christianity (and monotheism in general), generating and energising the move towards disenchantment. The tendency for early forms of monotheism to renounce materiality involves the further move in its religiosity to systematically exploit it (Gauchet 1997: 75–76). This paves the way for the crucial ontological duality that would challenge the restrictive *a priori* conceptual framework and spur religion onwards towards its eventual public dissolution. Once again, socio-political factors are granted causal primacy. Christianity, in particular, is unique in that it introduces a crucial dialectic into monotheistic immanent–transcendent ontology. This is because it introduces the idea of salvation via an investment in this world, rather than a renunciation of it. Furthermore, Christianity allows transcendence to fully embrace ontological duality, thereby unleashing a crucial socio-politically destabilising potential. In short, the Incarnational essence of Christianity engenders in believers a commitment to working within immanence, even though the transcendent otherness of a Christian God makes them dead to it. That is, the quest for the other life takes place within the context of this one (Gauchet 1997: 85). The problem posed for humanity of the infinite otherness of God inherent in monotheism is resolved, because through the Incarnation, He legitimises this world by manifesting in it. The decisive step towards human flourishing and disenchantment has been taken. Crucially, this opening up of an immanent path to salvation eventually encouraged some Christians to embrace a personal path to God apart from the institutions that were, as we saw above, the breach between immanence and transcendence by virtue of their status as the representation of God’s otherness in this world.

What we are seeing develop in Gauchet’s account is a degree of autonomy for materiality from the transcendent other that is its foundation. Its earliest political manifestation is, of course, absolutism. But Gauchet makes the point that, by virtue of its foundations in a newly conceptualised immanent dimension of relative autonomy, absolutism contains within it the seeds of democracy. Paradoxically thus, state forms that are supposed to be the temporal expressions

within immanence of transcendent powers contribute to a process of secularisation (Gauchet 1997: 57–58). And so Gauchet identifies its emancipating utility as the primary reason why monotheism appeared in human history when it did around 3,500 years ago. The God of Moses was borne out of repression and revolt. Positing Him as transcendent functioned to elevate His law above any possible terrestrial power and hence beyond any perceptual and hierarchical embodiment (Gauchet 1997: 107–109). In short, the ontological duality of monotheism was a response to existing repressive socio-political forces of monistic religions that functioned to preserve existing hierarchical systems. Monotheism, in contrast to the monistic faiths, served revolutionary interests, because it represented turning the founding past’s archetypal absence (i.e. the irrecoverable founding past) into something accessible and knowable. And it did this by virtue of the immanent–transcendent dialectic at the heart of its metaphysical logic – a transcendent God with the capacity to intervene in human affairs. Here we have Gauchet’s basic contention that monotheism in general and Christianity in particular were oppositional responses to the sociocultural reality of imperialism.

The historical story that Gauchet tells nears completion when we reach the post-religious age, when the social and cultural forces unleashed by Christianity are turned against it (Gauchet 1997: 162). For example, the thrust of the democratisation process originating within a Christian framework initiated, over a period of about 300 years, a process of thorough secularisation, whereby the social infrastructure became centred on an immanent subjective humanism. The forces of democratic political tolerance and technical rationality that Christian transcendence formulated are now utilised in the process of its dissolution. The forces of PDM – and especially the Cartesian ego – are accordingly unleashed. Secularisation is therefore defined as the end of ‘the complete organisation of the human-social sphere by religion’ (Gauchet 1997: 164). The reasons for this are to be found in Gauchet’s contention regarding the necessarily repressive impulse in the religious mindset that constrains humankind’s transformative capacity. Remember that Gauchet accounts for the emergence of transcendence as a crucial historical development towards the exit from religion. Its success lies only in its ability to challenge monistic faith’s complete hold over human transformative activity and thought. It helps liberate humanity by loosening the bonds of religion’s hold on us. Indeed, transcendence equips the modern secular self with the means of shrugging off religion once and for all.

### **Gauchet’s concept of superstructural religion**

One might think that once transcendence has discharged its democratising function and the age of infrastructural religion has passed into history, we would have entered a post-religious age. For Gauchet, however, the attraction to religion and transcendence will generally persist for many people, albeit indexed to personal (egoistic) visions of the good – a process that he calls *superstructural* religion. This is his recognition of religion’s ability to generate personal faith

and concomitant socially instituted practices such as church attendance – a *subjective* function or ‘ineliminable subjective stratum’ (Gauchet 1997: 200) that survives the ending of its *social* function.

This might, at first glance, seem very similar to Taylor’s identification of an enduring religious aspiration, which, we will see in more detail later, is a possible feature of his classification of the modern self. But this is not evidence of a departure from a reductionist agenda on Gauchet’s part. Instead, he locates the source of the persistence of faith in a post-infrastructure religious aspiration; the inclination for many of us to embrace otherness into the post-religious age. He posits the intrinsic tendency for thought to partition reality between the immediately given world of sensation and another reality that is undifferentiated by the manifold of the senses – a world ‘that suddenly appears before the mind when we go beyond the visible to examine its nondifferentiated unity and continuity’ (Gauchet 1997: 201), an ‘unlimited-undifferentiated … borderless uncentred whole, completely continuous and indeterminate’ (Gauchet 1997: 201–202). He insists that this ‘constitutive mode of apprehending the real’ (Gauchet 1997: 201) is the prerequisite of theistic doctrine, but ‘may function autonomously within the most thoroughgoing atheistic framework’ (Gauchet 1997: 201). Indeed, he locates it within modern science in terms of the Kantian inquiry into the *a priori* conditions of possibility of experience in general and scientific knowledge in particular. This is the division, characteristic of empirical metaphysics, between Kant’s *a priori* categories and the manifold of intuition or, as Gauchet puts it, the ‘application of the formative division to the physical reality of things, where the categories of the non-differentiated … play the role of regulative ideas, in the Kantian sense, at once unattainable, structuring and motivating’ (Gauchet 1997: 202). It is also evident in aesthetic experience in the sense that our experience is articulated by the imagination revealing mystery behind it (Gauchet 1997: 203). Again, he identifies the potential for the autonomy of otherness from religion by insisting that this imaginative capacity to apprehend the real once ‘constituted the anthropological support for religious activity’, but in the post-religious age of open futurism ‘begins to operate for itself’ as ‘an autonomous activity for exploring the sensory’ (Gauchet 1997: 203).

It seems that once the ‘anthropological support’ for the theistically mediated ego is removed, the self becomes free to comprehend the dualistic reality it posits (the sensuous and extra-sensuous other) in a variety of ways, both secular and religious. Indeed, perhaps the most interesting aspect of Gauchet’s post-religious search for otherness lies in the continuing fascination with basic and obscure human concerns that religion resolved for us (Gauchet 1997: 205). Our sense of self, he tells us, is split between our desires for self-affirmation and self-effacement. Religion reveals to us these concerns, but in ‘a well-regulated and clearly defined form’ (Gauchet 1997: 205). In the post-religious age, these concerns appear as anything but resolved, thus eliciting a ‘dreadful uncertainty’ (Gauchet 1997: 205) and discomfort about our sense of self. The assurances that religion has traditionally offered us regarding our place in society and role in life (assurances which thus convey the necessity of our existence) have lost their

power, precisely because religion has lost its sociological and political utility. We need new ways to justify the self in order to prevent an unpredicted growth in a contingent sense of self with all the unease that goes along with it (Gauchet 1997: 206). These are the problems of the post-religious *subjectification* of the self, where we are set free from the religious sources that provided crucial answers to essential questions of being and purpose. We are now merely beings-for-ourselves. In this way, not only does Gauchet’s post-religious world involve secularist open futurism, but a persistent religious aspiration, albeit analysable as a subjectivist superstructural, rather than infrastructural, phenomenon. Despite losing its infrastructural utility, religion will still prove attractive to some people seeking resolution of this problem, including a re-engagement with traditional faiths, as well as taking up more modern religious options. Presumably, this re-engagement with established systems of thought is how Gauchet would account for fundamentalism and new atheism. As we saw in the last chapter, both are grasped as manifestations of the Cartesian anxiety, but Gauchet would interpret them as desperate and belligerent attempts to reconnect with an essentially infrastructural foundation of inviolate first principles in a world where the self has become immersed in post-modernity’s social and moral chaos.

This is a most interesting vision of the post-religious society, because it seems that once religion has performed its democratising function and left the stage of history, there remains a price to be paid for many people in the post-religious liberation of *a priori* characteristics of the human condition. Again, Gauchet demonstrates his dissatisfaction with conventional Durkheimian categories. He acknowledges the limitations of secular open futurism in its ability to provide satisfactory resolutions to key problems associated with the continuing search for meaning and purpose in otherness<sup>2</sup> that survives the dissolution of infrastructural faith. The type of open futurism he advocates by its very openness points to the contingency of the subject, so it should not surprise us that many people continue to turn to religion to avoid the discomfort and uncertainty that this vision offers. This post-religious society is ‘psychologically draining for individuals since it no longer protects or supports them when they are constantly forced with the questions: why me?’ (Gauchet 1997: 206) Despite the passing of religion’s infrastructural utility, it seems that the self’s intrinsic desire to seek otherness that persists into the post-religious age secures religion’s continuing psychological utility. From this, Gauchet provides an explanation for the successes of pathological systems such as fundamentalism and new atheism.

In this way, it seems to me, we can identify a contradiction (or at the very least a tension) of the self that Gauchet locates, but leaves unresolved. We are left with the option of embracing open futurism, whereby the potential of the transformative subject is unfettered from religious or secular visions of order, but which involves a contingent subjectivism that includes the danger of self-effacement. Or we can go down the route of a subjectively mediated (i.e. superstructural) re-engagement with religious tradition, whose sense of order would overcome our sense of contingency, but at the expense of restraining our transformative capacity, albeit it is now indexed to a personal vision and experience.

Using the terminology of PMR, Gauchet presents the choices of the demi-real – a reaffirmation of PDM’s universality of disenchantment and truncated rationality of Cartesian egocentrism (in some form or another) or the unfettering of the self’s transformative capacity in a courageous embracing of the post-modern contingent subject. In my own view, the non-dualistic universality that PMR opens up to us means that there is no reason to pay the price for the completion of the democratic process at the risk of Cartesian anxiety or post-modernist self-effacement. We have already hinted at such a critique of Gauchet’s in Bhaskar’s concept of practical mysticism, where transcendent ground-states are posited as constitutive mechanisms of emancipative discourses. As we will see, this reaches its fullest potential in the Open System dialectics of Ernst Bloch (although it is also a key feature of Hegelian political thought out of which Blochean thinking emerged, as we will see). The unresolved contradiction Gauchet identifies is a symptom of the dualistic conception of the self that he embraces. I will argue that this is something which is absent, in particular, from Bloch’s philosophy of the “not yet”. Once grasped non-dualistically, transcendence becomes the means whereby *a priori* transformational agency becomes realised, rather than obstructed. But before we do this, I want to focus on the key weakness in Gauchet’s superstructural account of religion. Despite his innovative analysis, he remains, in essence, wedded to the third position of MST – Durkheimianism. In the section below, we look at Taylor’s alternative approach to the subjectification of the self that he feels leaves open an irreducible religious experience. Taylor’s approach to transcendence is instructive, because it offers an alternative account of the process of disenchantment that posits ways in which transcendence may be de-coupled from infrastructural and superstructural processes of the self. This de-coupling is possible because of Taylor’s vital contribution to non-duality and his critique of disenchantment – his positing of morality/spirituality and rationality as inextricably intertwined. This is the basis of his powerful critique of the dualistic thrust of radical Enlightenment discourse – i.e. the pretence of a truly *disengaged* rationality that we have seen arises with new atheism. His analysis is important, because in so representing the self’s relationship to religion, he constructs a defence of the judgemental rationality of transcendence that involves the search for deeper moral sources that pervades all definitions of selfhood.

## Approaches to Transcendence II: Charles Taylor

In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor constructs an interesting and instructive account of the mutation of religious doctrines in the direction of a more utilitarian and instrumental ethics regarding the human condition, an evolution which placed greater emphasis on the role of *human flourishing* and *well-being*. These are the new moral sources of secularism, dating from classical utilitarianism, which its principal exponents failed to acknowledge (Taylor 1989: 338). It is in this search, rather than infrastructural or superstructural accounts, that explanatory primacy for any worldview – religious or secular – is to be found.

In *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor tells a very different story to that of Gauchet concerning the rise of transcendence that hinges on three key categories. The first two parallel Gauchet's classification of infrastructural religion – *paleo-Durkheimian* and *neo-Durkheimian* faith. The third is of particular interest to us in identifying the non-reductionist thrust of Taylor's analysis and how it strongly rejects Gauchet's notion of superstructural religion. It is known as the *post-Durkheimian* aspect. Perhaps a useful way to understand Gauchet's thesis is to see infrastructural and superstructural religion as discharging an important *instrumentally rational* function. It is in this way that we are to understand his account of religion as grounded in the narrowing judgemental rationality of PDM and MST. A major theme that can be detected in Taylor's writings is the emergence and evolution of instrumental rationality within religious discourse. For example, theistic doctrine evolved in the early modern period to include notions of human flourishing associated with new human rights ideas. Taylor points to this as a demonstration of the theistic origins of discourses that would later become foundational to secular modern societies.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the origin of the Cartesian ego – the idea of the subject as self-defining, i.e. withdrawn from the world of sensuous experience – is located in the Augustinian emphasis on coming to know God via inward rationality. Taylor calls this a 'proto-cogito' (Taylor 1989: 132). The rational ego is seen as dependent upon a transcendent beyond that is present intersubjectively to all egos. We have here an Augustinian intuitive realism where inward experience is the means of accessing a transcendent beyond of perfection, which is the source of morality. This is a definite Platonic influence on Augustine's thinking, where the concept of onto-logos was fused with the Christian idea of Creation as the embodiment of God's ideas (Taylor 1989: 220). The tradition of ontological proofs from Anselm to Descartes can be traced back to this intuitive principle (Taylor 1989: 141–142). Descartes radicalises it by dissolving the Platonic ontological status of the moral sources. They are not pre-existent, but are constructed inwardly. Augustine insisted that intuition lacked self-sufficiency and merely uncovered divine moral order, whereas the Cartesian principle of *self-generated “clear and distinct ideas”* infused the inwardness of the ego with self-sufficiency. In short, Descartes introduces a shift away from the Platonic subject-object to a world where sharp boundaries were to be drawn between the psyche and the physical (Taylor 1989: 191). The mind is radically drawn back from the world to concentrate purely on its own way of seeing and thinking about things. This is the self-defining subject that has dominated PDM ever since, where the world is divested of intrinsic meaning and instead is seen as contingent and disenchanted. We have here the origin of the sources of the modern self. Disenchantment and contingency give birth to a new sense of power and the desire to control nature for the betterment of humanity (Taylor 1975: 7–9). The Cartesian ego is thus the origin of instrumental rationality (Taylor 1989: 149–151) with the new mechanistic sciences seen, initially, as part of pious man's striving to uncover divine purposes in nature (Taylor 1975: 522; 1989: 232).

The Cartesian ego therefore becomes the foundation of modern epistemology's approach to the subject and the realisation of freedom (Taylor 1975: 7).

This would inspire the later Enlightenment radicalisation of the self-defining subject divested of all external guidance with the dissolution of Descartes' ontological proofs. Accordingly, instrumental rationality would be thoroughly secularised, directed towards modernity's humanitarian life goals shorn of higher meaning. The radical autonomy of the Cartesian self prepares the ground for modernity's later secular revolution (Taylor 1989: 156–8). This liberated the subject from defining himself in relation to external (divine) standards of perfection. And so this radicalisation is the key to PDM's dualistic disenchantment process. We depart from the idea of the universe being the embodiment of meaningful order, which defines the good, and embrace the idea of it as mere mechanism.

In particular, Descartes' conception of the ego inspired Kant's theory of the radically autonomous subject – a move that is itself a vital prefiguration of post-Kantian moves towards non-dualism and depth rationality that, I am arguing, are central to meta-post-secularism. But it is important to point out, before we look at Kant, that the Cartesian ego does not herald the truncated rationality we saw characterise PDM (in the previous chapter), despite the radicalisation of Augustinian duality. Such narrowing of the dimensions of the rational only happens in the context of later Enlightenment naturalism's attempt to divest instrumental rationality of the ego's deeper (spiritual) moral sources. In his study of Hegel, Taylor identifies this distinctive contribution by the radical Enlightenment as the objectification of the self where the ego is itself part of disenchanted (mechanistic, atomistic) nature (Taylor 1975: 10). In this way, the disenchantment of the ego is the correlative of the disenchantment of nature, with one reinforcing the other in support of an overall ontological atomism that is characteristic of CM.<sup>4</sup> In an important sense, the radical Enlightenment of Hume and others was inspired by Cartesian disenchantment to radicalise it by extending it to the rational ego. And so we have the paradox of Descartes being a key inspiration for the formulation of materialist monism characteristic of Enlightenment naturalism.

This is the attempt to prove that unbiased rational study of empirical evidence divorced from energising moral and spiritual intuitions – the search for goodness and affirmation and the desire to make sense of things – that have motivated humankind is possible (Taylor 1989: 323). But as we have just seen, Taylor defines modernity not as the period in human history when we became free from moral sentiment, but, rather, the time when the affirmation of ordinary life and human flourishing became the primary life goods. Rationality becomes truncated when we repress these moral sources. In CR/PMR terms, as we saw in the last chapter, this is the occlusion at 1M of intransitivity and depth meaning (EN/DEN) characteristic of empiricism and rationalism of CM. The failure of Enlightenment naturalism can be seen for Taylor in the legacy beyond even its own narrow parameters. We have already seen this in the last chapter in the narrowing of the dimensions of judgemental rationality that characterises PDM. This can be seen in the notion of the isolated individual of the state of nature in liberal social contract theory or the utilitarian disengaged psychology of amoral

pain/pleasure calculus of the individual mind that becomes the criterion of right action by the community – an amorality that is the basis for utilitarian ethics (Taylor 1989: 337–338). We have ‘Enlightenment humanism’ (Taylor 1989: 336) that embraces a truncated rationality that has repressed its own depth morality.

This tension between the disenchanted ego and its repressed moral sources gives rise to Kant’s notion of radical autonomy. The problem was how one could maintain a coherent concept of freedom if the ego was itself part of nature and, as such, subject to deterministic laws. He argued that the ontological monism of the radical Enlightenment committed us to a view of freedom that left no room for moral choice. Surely, Kant contended, if freedom is simply the freedom to be motivated by desire then we are unable to make moral choices, especially when acting morally conflicts with our particular desires. The transformation of modernity towards a deeper inwardness inspired Kant to secure human freedom by locating rationality in a domain lifted out of nature’s determinism. Via his transcendental argument – where he argues back from experience to the cognitive conditions that make the distinctively human character of experience possible – he deepens our knowledge of the subject once more. This rescues the moral stance from Enlightenment empiricism, but at the expense of a return to the duality of consciousness from nature. We saw this was Kant’s concept of pure unknowable matter – negative noumena – that was the presupposition of the pure categories of understanding. We have a subject–object non-identity that is the basis of the self’s freedom from external moral constraints and natural causality; a radical transcendental freedom of the self-determining, rational will (Taylor 1975: 31). Thus Kant’s reaffirmation of moral sources is undertaken via a deepening of duality’s estrangement from nature, whereby inwardness and intuition are radicalised as sources of the good. We are reacquainted with deeper moral sources by way of this radicalisation of the autonomy of the rational subject. It is within this philosophical framework that we are to understand our discussion in the last chapter concerning the contribution to post-secular thought that John Rawls makes. He formulates the principles that are important to his attempts to reassess the role of religion in modern society such as public reasonableness and fallibilism from this essentially Kantian position.

That Rawls’ account is hamstrung by the narrow rationality of the isolated ego, as we saw in the last chapter, should not surprise us, given these presuppositions. We saw that PMR tries to identify morality and freedom in the external world itself. These were the EN and DEN of EC and DCR that were described as requiring non-duality in Bhaskar’s spiritual writings. I think this move closely parallels attempts in post-Kantian philosophy to extend the radical autonomy of the modern subject into nature itself. Taylor points to the post-Enlightenment endeavour to rethink modernity’s life goods (primacy of human flourishing) in terms of a self-interpreting intuitive humanism divested of Augustinian and Cartesian *a priorism*. Rather, an intuitive grasp of humanity’s significance is to be derived from our immersion in definite sensuousness (i.e. *a posteriori*). Here we can trace Taylor’s sympathy with Romanticism’s

dissolution of the Cartesian ego and disenchantment and the incorporation of modernity’s life goods into a naturalist–humanism of the *embodied* subject. Romantics such as Herder, prefiguring EN, overcame the dualistic essence of the Enlightenment by positing an intuitive interconnectedness of mind with nature, yielding the deep moral sources that disengaged rationality had occluded and Kant had restricted to the isolated ego. Here we have an ontological monism characteristic of the Romanticist backlash against the radical Enlightenment and the Kantian subject (Taylor 1989: 349). Moral sentiment and feeling are valued not in terms of the actions they demand of us, but in Platonic terms, whereby we are animated by our transcendent identification with nature and humanity (Taylor 1989: 372–373). The universe is not some disenchanted mechanism to be grasped either because the ego is itself a manifestation of it or with disengaged reason as though we are capable of detached observance, but rather by our sensuous immersion in its layers of intrinsic meaning and recognition of our status as an emergent property of it. Therefore, the self unfolds in its sensuous expression and so cannot, contra Descartes, be known *a priori* (Taylor 1975: 81). We can detect the theme of spirituality from Romanticism to modern art where the poet/painter/musician reaches beyond the subject to recover higher, transcendent forms of life in which he/she is immersed (Smith 2002: 221). One detects within this tradition the prefiguration of key PMR warnings of the pathologies associated with duality and disenchantment – estrangement, alienation, instrumentality and power<sup>2</sup> relations – and the categories of ground-state and co-presence grasped in terms of consciousness’ trans-subjective identification of itself as an emergent stratum of a deep base stratum of reality – God or nature.

This post-Kantian non-duality and re-enchantment cannot, therefore, be seen as a return to pre-modern discourse, because its adherents are appropriating the Cartesian notion of the radical autonomy of the subject (i.e. as *self*-defining). There is nothing here, for example, of medieval scholasticism’s positing of a divine order to be realised *beyond* the subject. The essence that is realised is transcendent to be sure, but the subject’s status as an emergent stratum – and a crucial one at that – of the cosmic order ensures that it is something that unfolds *within* us. Self-awareness does not, therefore, involve the *a priori* characteristics of the disembodied Cartesian ego, but is an ongoing *a posteriori* process of sensuous expression in material life. For Herder in particular, we are free not when we are lifted outside a natural world conceived of as mere mechanism, but when we, in the process of our unfolding within nature, find a mode of expression that is adequate to ourselves. As we will see in the next chapter, Hegel is a central figure in the marriage of expressivist anti-duality with modernity by conceiving this idea of embodied freedom in terms of the radical autonomy of the *rational* subject (Taylor 1979: 25). This is the non-dualistic confluence of modernity’s key normative value of freedom for the self with the judgemental rationality of transcendence that characterises Hegelian thought right up to and including Bloch’s creative materialism and Bhaskar’s PMR. I will argue later that they share much with Hegel’s rationality–freedom relation. As we will see in the next chapter, Taylor takes it in a theistic direction by suggesting that the best way in

which we can realise non-dualistic rational freedom is via the Christian concept of agape. For Bloch's part, it is possible to give it a materialist application that he insists is compatible with Marxism. As we will see in [Chapter 6](#), however, I am of the view that recovering the point of contact between enchanted nature and consciousness as emergent from it sits somewhat awkwardly with the anthropological–biological evolutionary dialectic presented by Marx and Engels. This tension hinges on the differences between Bloch's meta-utopian and the latter's immanent utopian perspectives. We will examine this later. For now, it is sufficient to know that nature as a moral source may be divested of, on the one hand, providential Deistic references to God such as we see with much of the Enlightenment and post-Kantian panentheistic cosmic spirit (Hegel) or post-Hegelian theism (Taylor), on the other. But we can retain the idea of nature as meaning-laden and our identity with it. From its beginnings in the panentheism of Schelling and Hegel via Feuerbachian anthropologism and through to the creative materialism of Bloch, this crucial turn to nature as a deep moral source of the self and its freedom is a powerful example of the loosening links between materialism, on the one hand, and disenchantment/disengagement, on the other.

For his part, Taylor's differences with Gauchet can be highlighted by his idea of the self's transcendent identification. Despite his sympathy for Romanticism's success in retrieving depth meaning via a non-subjective/non-dualistic articulation of modernity's moral sources, Taylor is also sympathetic with Friedrich Nietzsche's warning that this is at the cost of encouraging an inflexible morality with dehumanising and repressive consequences for humans' free expression. Nietzsche is famously concerned that a non-subjectivist appropriation of moral sources is merely the vehicle for the imposition of power onto the self. We saw in the last chapter that a celebration of the prodigious power of subjectivity by dissolving a sense of meaning's universality was characteristic of post-modernist conceptualisations of the self. The self becomes geo-historically situated with the victory of relativised identity and difference. This Nietzschean influence can be seen especially in the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Taylor instead opts for a new orientation to nature that revives non-subjectivity. He is inspired, to be sure, by the modernist discourses that have attempted to identify problems with the articulation of ‘subjectivist strands’ (Smith 2002: 227) within certain modernist definitions of the self and develop non-subjectivist tendencies. Indeed, the persistence of frameworks that point beyond the mere immanence of the subject is, for Taylor, evidence of a yearning for ‘some kind of higher life’ (Taylor 1989: 25). This is an objectivity that transcends and exists independently of our particular passions and desires (Taylor 1989: 53).

### **The buffered self and beyond: theistic affirmations of the human**

The modernist emphasis on human flourishing and the evolution of the self in subjectivist directions that has resulted is captured by Taylor's concept of the *buffered self*. The triumph of modernity is its self-defining life goods – the

minimisation of suffering, benevolence and justice characteristic of its key normative values. As we have seen, this subjectivism had theistic origins. We have also seen that what Romanticism achieves above all for Taylor is to reacquaint us with these transcendent/enchanted dimensions that Enlightenment naturalism had severed. In other words, in the hands of Augustinian and Cartesian definitions, we have the emergence of the buffered self, mediated non-subjectively. Enlightenment naturalism divests the ego of these transcendent connections. It is in this context that we are to understand the narrowing dimensions of rationality of key stages in the history of PDM – especially CM and HM. Romanticism, along with post-Romanticism and especially modern art, represents the revival of non-subjectivist interpretations of the buffered self in the sense that they open us up to wider and deeper senses of reality by encouraging a spiritual intensity that takes us beyond the narrow confines of the Enlightenment rational ego. Taylor is impressed by the expressive self-realisation that modern art achieves (Smith 2002: 228). So he identifies, within certain strands of PDM, the potential for a non-subjectivism, albeit one that is indexed to personal experiences.

This potential is crucial for Taylor’s post-secularism, because an important part of the expansion of the judgementally rational that it involves are traces of a longing for the religious. PDM that pushes us in the direction of subjectivism – such as secular humanism – is unable to satisfy this and so, in a very real sense, secularism is unable to motivate us to realise the moral sources of the buffered self – i.e. to meet modernity’s life goods. This, I think, would be Taylor’s explanation of the power<sup>2</sup> relations that have resulted from CM/HM’s ego-non-ego duality. The benevolent emancipative impulse that the buffered self demands, under the truncation of the rational to the narrow confines of the CM/HM ego, remains unfulfilled as it degenerates into a source of aggression against recalcitrant (non)egos. It also explains his dissatisfaction with the geo-historically situated self of post-modernity. We have seen, in the previous chapter, how the post-modernist solution to the truncated rationality of the abstract ego is to dissolve judgemental rationality itself. It does not so much dissolve disenchantment as dissolve the rationality of disenchantment by destroying the self’s interconnectivity and interrelatedness with other selves and nature. Meaning becomes truncated to the geo-historically situated self leading to a kind of hyper-subjective grasp of the buffered identity. In his critique of the Nietzschean origins of this thinking, we have seen how Taylor is unconvinced that modernity’s life goods and normative values can be secured any more successfully here than they could under the auspices of the Enlightenment, because it represses our longing for deeper meaning. He, in fact, echoes Bhaskar in calling for the principle of unconditional love as the antidote to both the Cartesian anxieties of the Enlightenment and the hyper-subjectivism of post-modernity. Without it, the social pathologies of modernity’s unfulfilled high ideals emerge. Where he differs from Bhaskar, as we will see shortly, is his contention that Christian agape is best suited to the realisation of these transcendent humanist goals.

In all of this, we have a possible explanation for religion that goes beyond Gauchet’s definition of its post-infrastructural function in resolving possible

crises of the self. Taylor seems prepared to acknowledge superstructural religion with his identification of the *post-Durkheimian* age of religious faith. But he strongly rejects the adequacy of explaining it entirely in instrumentalist terms and in so doing opens up the possibility of a non-reductionist account of transcendence that Gauchet misses. The story that Taylor tells about the mutations in our sense of self from Christianity to the modern day is ample evidence that he is concerned by the explanatory poverty of MST, including Gauchet’s position. The truth is a more complex picture of an interrelation between differing conceptions of selfhood and the moral sources that underlie them (Taylor 1989: 412–413).

*A Secular Age* is of considerable importance in revealing Taylor’s thoughts on the non-reductionist longing for the religious. Let us examine Taylor’s categories in some detail. They are revealed to us in his rejection of MST regarding the rise of disenchantment and its implications for religion. Although his historical analysis of the evolution of religion is massive, his discussion from the early modern period is most illustrative for our purposes of examining powerful, new post-Durkheimian directions that established faiths have taken. We are talking here about the Protestant and Catholic Reformation. At first glance, our account of this phenomenon seems to lend credence to the Durkheimian reductionism we have seen represented, for example, by Bruce. Both Reformist movements acted to mobilise the faithful in response to the socio-political ramifications of disenchantment. The new thinking discredited traditional “organic” notions of a fixed hierarchy of social order that pre-existed the human beings who belonged to them. Taylor refers to this as the “*ancien régime*”, where political forms hinge on the Augustinian ontic dependence of the self on higher divine reality. As we have just seen, medieval scholasticism appropriated Platonic conceptions of matter as occupying a series of spheres ascending to God and posited social hierarchies as analogous to this cosmology (Gay 1967: 242–243). By contrast, the radicalisation of the Augustinian intuitive principle and the deconstruction of cosmic teleologism by the Cartesian ego was to energise an alternative model, which places the onus on human agency to realise godly purposes in secular time – a process that Taylor calls ‘mobilisation’ (Taylor 2007: 459–460) – and he contends that Catholicism and especially Protestantism were remarkably effective in inspiring the faithful in this new direction (Taylor 1989: 192; 2007: 444–445). Disenchantment did, indeed, pose massive problems for clerical elites in that the organic interconnection between divine purpose and politics was rent asunder. Mobilisation was a remarkably effective way to reintroduce a connection, but this time in secular rather than higher time. Taylor locates, for example, the origins of classical liberal social contractualism in the influence of puritanical notions of personal commitment. The agent was no longer immersed in a wider pre-existent cosmic order, but contained the sources of authority inwardly, thus rendering society merely consensual (Taylor 1989: 194). Platonic natural law makes way for liberal natural rights discourse, where Locke would unveil the pious life as centred on the ordered, rational and industrious self (Taylor 1989: 239) – i.e. the affirmation of ordinary life of the isolated rational subject as itself godly.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, this passage to mobilisation was not uniform, and Taylor notes the persistence of state forms that sought legitimacy in the ancien régime model (e.g. pre-revolutionary France), which he refers to as ‘paleo-Durkheimian’ (Taylor 2007: 459). The reconfiguration of the divine–political relation in response to disenchantment, where a greater emphasis was placed on human agency to realise God’s plan for the world, can be seen in the early eighteenth-century American Republic, nineteenth-century Anglican Christianity in the UK or, more recently, in the neo-conservatism of the Christian Right in the United States. This is known as “neo-Durkheimian” forms of religion. For Taylor, this ‘phenomenon of religiously-defined political identity-mobilisation’ (Taylor 2007: 459) is so beneficial to the sustenance of Christian forms in the US today, because it infuses the consciousness of the people with a sense of civilisational superiority over other parts of the world (Taylor 2007: 455–456). Their sense of morality has become so effectively fused with religious categories that religion itself becomes reinvigorated. But Taylor’s point is that there is a significant difference between acknowledging this and taking the further step characteristic of orthodox secularism of attributing an exclusively integrating function for religion. In other words, contra Gauchet’s analysis, there is more to the mobilisation phenomenon than the neo-Durkheimian recognition of religion’s binding socio-cultural and political function. It is one thing to take cognisance of the latter, but quite another to then reduce religion to the status of a dependent variable.

What Taylor is objecting to here is the simple equation of mobilisation with neo-Durkheimianism. In particular, he points to the reconstitution of Catholicism in post-revolutionary France. The neo-Durkheimian analysis would have it that the revival of the older, established faith was due to its functionality in providing people with skills and disciplines that the new urbanised environment in which they found themselves demanded of them (Taylor 2007: 468–469). This is to ignore a strong underlying emotional appeal that this renewed form of spirituality held for the faithful. Rather, a dualistic process is in evidence, where renewed spirituality was indeed useful in the necessary process of inculcating a new ethos of discipline and productivity in the new industrial and disenchanted world, but co-existed with a continuing search for the transcendent, as evidenced in localised expressions of faith. Religious belief therefore becomes an important site of the non-subjective mediation of the buffered self and is revealed in what Taylor calls ‘the transformation perspective’ (Taylor 2007: 433). This perspective describes the ‘transformation of human beings which takes them beyond or outside of what is normally understood as human flourishing.... In the Christian case, this means our participating in the love (agape) of God for human beings’ (Taylor 2007: 430).

Taylor therefore believes he has identified a continuing religious aspiration, which has survived the factual reality of declining belief in modernity (Taylor 2007: 530). He posits an intrinsic and irreducible yearning for the transcendent that motivates huge numbers, even the majority, of Western society today. We cannot simply reduce religion in the modern world to the status of the persistence of childish illusions of a bygone age or as providing a political,

socio-economic or cultural function. Nor is it exhausted by the characterisation of it as solving psychological neuroses. This is not to say that these factors may not contribute something to answering questions regarding religion’s appeal (or lack of it) in modern society. Our discussion of Gauchet’s vision demonstrates the importance of factoring into any analysis of religion in today’s world factors relating to the formation and sustenance of our social, political and cultural sense of self. But it is wrong to claim that any of these factors can, whether alone or together, fully provide explanations for religion’s continuing power to attract adherents. Rather, it seems that Taylor is firmly committed to a non-reductionist understanding of religion, whereby its underlying ontological postulations may still have explanatory power in accounting for its continuing popularity. That is, the pictures of the world that they present are successful in appealing to the continuing independent religious aspiration of a great deal of people. Indeed, he notes the impact of the post-Durkheimian ethic on our sense of the sacred by disembedding it from societal frameworks such as the church or state (Taylor 2007: 487). That is, our sense of self and ethical orientation to the world has been de-coupled from political allegiance. The Western societies where we can detect the ideal types of paleo-, neo- and post-Durkheimian senses of the sacred – be they informed by the values of exclusive humanism or Christianity – have not adopted any of them in their entirety at any particular time,<sup>6</sup> but, nevertheless, Taylor detects the rising importance of post-Durkheimian trends.

What is most significant for our purposes here is the challenge to underlying senses of self and identity that expressive individualism, such as that witnessed by modern art, and its attendant forms of spirituality poses. Taylor departs from Gauchet in his contention that the post-Durkheimian aspiration is capable of transcending the subjectivism of secular interpretations of the buffered self. As we have seen, our link to the transcendent is to be sustained by emotional engagement, rather than by pursuing the goals of human flourishing (be they expressed in terms of civilisational order or the psychosis of the self). The same could be said for the fixed, divinely decreed, hierarchical sociology encouraged by the *porous self* characteristic of paleo-Durkheimian discourse. Above all, by allowing the religious aspiration to break free from the rigidity of theological orthodoxy demanded by both disciplinary matrices, expressive individualism creates the possibility of a multiplication of choice that had hitherto been unavailable to the average person. Taylor notes the paradoxical origins of such pluralism within a particular form of the buffered self – the exclusive humanism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Taylor 2007: 491). The rise of atheism and agnosticism as viable options at this time created fractured cultures within the West. Cultural pluralism became possible, albeit initially within the parameters of the buffered identity. In principle, people could freely choose between secular or providential Deistic neo-Durkheimian dispensations (although in practice, such freedom was often illusory, as the examples of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms aptly demonstrate). It was within this context that the greatly accelerated pluralism of expressive individualism flourished. It seems that the disciplinary matrix of the buffered self had already begun to weaken

itself by encouraging choice, which served to undermine the rigid philosophical orthodoxy that its worldview required.

Taylor contends that the choice expressive individualism offered above all was an alternative to exclusive humanism. In other words, it provided an alternative to what we saw Gauchet conceptualise as the closed immanence of secular humanism. Expressive individualism offered a revival of spirituality, but not within the parameters of the buffered identity. As a non-subjective grasp of the buffered self, expressive individualism is therefore a philosophical humanism in the sense that it is grounded, as we have seen, in the human desire for fulfilment via the celebration of the passions and senses of the individual against the mechanistic and dehumanising utilitarian ethics of instrumental rationality. And yet, in this, it paradoxically points us beyond mere human flourishing by embracing our sense of connection to a higher transcendent reality. It is a humanism that aspires to the transcendence of mere human flourishing. Indeed, a crucial part of this glance beyond the merely subjective is Taylor’s point that it is perfectly possible for this search to take us in directions that are compatible with communitarianism, even those of traditional faith structures, such as church attendance and prayer groups. Indeed, it appears that the post-Durkheimian dispensation can lead us to embrace the latter, without having to submit to rigid doctrinal authoritarianism and its attendant socio-political and national identity forming functions. We have a self-affirmative route to spirituality that involves a clear social element, but one divested of any Durkheimian credentials. It seems that via expressionist individualist humanism, we can nevertheless arrive at spiritual collectivism.

## Conclusion

I think that Taylor’s widening of the definition of what counts as “religious” by taking us beyond the narrow confines of paleo- and neo-Durkheimian matrices, as well as the restricted definition of post-Durkheimian religion represented by Gauchet, should be seen as a call for a more multifaceted appreciation of the religious phenomenon. Acknowledging post-Durkheimian transcendence as a route to belief is not meant to represent the inapplicability of the preceding modes of analysis. Rather, it represents their respective declines as paradigmatic models since at least the 1960s to the point where especially the neo-Durkheimian model can co-exist with its post-Durkheimian counterpart, as Taylor understood it. Indeed, Taylor calls for the constraining influence of doctrinal authority as a necessary counter-measure to prevent the individualised experience of religiosity from sliding towards forms of undemanding spirituality that expressive individualism can often produce (Taylor 2007: 512). He tells us that established faiths that have secured sustenance by travelling the paleo- and neo-Durkheimian roads in the past should have nothing to fear and much to gain from embracing the age of post-Durkheimian transcendence. The cost may be the multiplication of spiritual and even non-spiritual options, but the benefits of energising new paths to faith that do not rely on various kinds of enforced

conformity (e.g. spiritual stultification, inner revolts against rigidities of doctrine and Gospel and the blurring of power–faith distinctions) are surely worth it (Taylor 2007: 513). Neo-Durkheimianism does not so much disappear, therefore, as retreat a certain distance (Taylor 2007: 522).

The resonance of Taylor’s post-Durkheimian analysis provides him with the basis of his definition of post-secularism: the age where religious belief is no longer unchallengeable, but neither is it untenable. Rather, the “‘post-secular’ . . . [refers to] a time in which the hegemony of the master narrative of secularisation will be more and challenged’ (Taylor 2007: 534). This is an important analysis, because it offers compelling evidence that the account of post-infrastructural religion to which Gauchet refers is insufficient. It is not enough to account for the “post-religious age” in terms of a superstructural crisis of the self. An irreducible aspect of the religious condition that points to its existence as a response to (or at the very least a longing for) a transcendent reality persists into our so-called secular contemporary society.

In terms of our discussions in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) on the shortcomings of disenchantment and duality, it is obvious that Taylor makes an important contribution. Transcendent non-subjective directions in which the life goods of modernity may be explored have resonances with PMR’s positing of depth meaning to both nature and the self. The crucial departure, however, lies in Taylor’s insistence that eudemonistic objectives are best secured via unconditional love that is theistically mediated. The high ideals of modernity can only be realised, for Taylor, by our participation in an interpretation of the transcendent and infinite that is sensitive to, specifically, Christian agape. If he were in debate with Bhaskar, he would argue that this provides us with the best hope of living in accordance with our relations of co-presence with others. At first glance, this is similar to the practical mysticism that we have seen Bhaskar call for, at least in *RMR* and *PMR*. This is, we will recall, when the realisation of eudemonia is dependent upon acknowledging its metaReal sources and presuppositions. But we will see throughout the rest of this book that a non-theistic approach to this in general, which begins with panentheism and reaches completion in creative materialism, is the most promising.

It is to this task that we will now turn. To anticipate some of what follows, it might be instructive to highlight one or two shortcomings of Taylor’s approach –namely, his preparedness to come to terms with key aspects of PDM. This is evident in the paradox of locating a deeper (or rather higher) sense of self transcendent of PDM’s rational ego that expressivist individualism opens up to us. That modernity is so steeped in secularised normative values is evidence that ontological frameworks of meaning are central to a coherent sense of self (Taylor 1989: 19). Given this strong religious indebtedness of PDM and the persistence of post-Durkheimian religion, it should not surprise us that Taylor insists that the modern identity is a complex matrix made up of three main sources – God, nature and reason. All three demand an objective foundation of the good and the moral. Indeed, these frameworks are, for Taylor, evidence of a yearning for ‘some kind of higher life’ (Taylor 1989: 25). This is an objectivity

that transcends and exists independently of our particular passions and desire (Taylor 1989: 53). The affirmation of ordinary life, human flourishing, etc. are important contributions to challenging traditional social structures of fixed hierarchy, as we have seen, but this does not mean that they are not pervaded with a search for higher meaning. Underlying Taylor’s concept of the self, one detects the persistence of a dichotomous treatment of the ego – immanence is ultimately energised by higher purposes. And so if we are to proceed with him, we are unlikely to adhere to the criteria of practical mysticism that is so important if we aspire to the realisation of eudemonia, as we have seen in the last chapter and which I will expand upon further in the next.

## Notes

- 1 The crucial underlying explanation for this again seems to lie in Gauchet’s postulation of core ahistorical human tendencies. The emergence of state forms is the result of the seemingly inexorable power of reflectiveness and transformative agency that asserts itself as necessary, even in the midst of a social world that is founded on the denial of these human constitutive qualities (Gauchet 1997: 35).
- 2 Gauchet’s superstructural position must be seen as a rationalist inversion of the basic new atheist view of religion as performing a vital psychological function for some people in the post-religious age.
- 3 An excellent short, accessible, but informative discussion on the origin of secular normative values in theistic discourse can be found in Graeme Smith’s *A Short History of Secularism* (Smith 2008). For an equally well-written account of the debt that modern science owes to medieval thought, see James Hannam’s excellent *God’s Philosophers* (Hannam 2009).
- 4 David Hume is perhaps the most famous exponent of empiricist naturalism. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739], he collapsed reason into the physicality and atomism of the passions when he argued that ‘reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’ (Hume [1739] 1978: 415).
- 5 We can also detect this in Calvin’s theory of predestination and belief in divine omnipotence, which influences Hobbes’ vision of anti-social man in general and natural rights in particular (Martinich 1992, 1996).
- 6 One only has to note the strength of neo-Durkheimian modes of identity in all three of the main Christian faiths – the Christian Right in the US, the persistence of authoritarian frameworks of faith in Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans and the resistance of the Vatican to new forms of spirituality that are informed by expressive individualist ethics. Christianity that is sustained by the link between theism and civilisational order is far from dead.

## 4 Freedom, rationality and God

### Hegelian dialectical historical panentheism

We saw in the last chapter in our discussion of Charles Taylor's philosophy how key PMR categories of ground-state, fine structure, co-presence and the judgemental rationality of transcendence relate to a non-dualistic grasp of key normative values of modernity. Enlightenment notions of freedom are centred on the essentially Cartesian concept of the disembodied self. The non-dualistic critique of this, of which PMR is perhaps the most sophisticated contemporary version, begins with the expressivism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is developed by the post-Kantianism of Schelling and especially Hegel. Kant's theory of the radical rational autonomy of the subject, although conceived dualistically, was incorporated into expressive non-duality to produce the Hegelian system. In this chapter, I wish to expand on this close linkage between freedom and rationality in non-dualistic thought by exploring Hegel's own system and examine whether it is able to secure our key PMR categories. I argue that we need to understand this system as a form of subject panentheism and reject alternative interpretations, especially the immanentism that Taylor and Bhaskar (among others) attribute to "orthodox" Hegelian thought. The key concept in my reconstruction of Hegel as a panentheist is *finite self-transcendence*, and I will discuss this in considerable detail below. In the process of these discussions, I will argue that this interpretation of Hegel is compatible with meta-post-secularism. We will see how it represents a rehabilitation of the judgemental rationality of transcendence that, I suggest, is of importance to Hegel's grasp of normative political concepts (freedom, justice, democracy, etc.). This will pre-figure my examination of Ernst Bloch's system and the contribution that his process materialism can make to meta-post-secularism in the next chapter. I will introduce below why I think that finite self-transcendence involves the ontological commitment to *panentheistic emergence*. This is the idea that freedom is the fundamental ground-state of being from which emerges finite reality as the struggle to realise itself as freedom. In [Chapter 6](#), I contrast this ontology with Bloch's process materialism, which places ontological primacy in finite reality itself and posits freedom (and thus infinity) as an emergent category of matter.

There are few philosophers whose thinking on religion and theology are as closely intertwined with their political theory and philosophy of history as Hegel. In particular, I am of the view that one cannot grasp his thoughts on issues about

rationality, freedom, history and society independently of his metaphysics on the nature and reality of God (although there are many commentators who have tried,<sup>1</sup> not least Taylor himself, as we will see). In the last chapter, I briefly introduced how Hegel adapted key norms of modernity to expressivist non-duality with his concept of radical freedom in terms of the embodied rationality of the self. We saw that his idea of the self and freedom – in definition, at least – was essentially Kantian in that human beings reach their fullest potential when they are truly *self*-governing – i.e. free from external impediments. Kant's transcendentalism was the means whereby the subject is lifted beyond these impediments understood as material determinants of desire and the passions. In the *Philosophy of Right* ([1821] 2001) (hereafter *PR*), Hegel is clearly in agreement with Kant when he says:

Man ... is the completely undetermined, and stands above impulse, and may fix and set it up as his. Impulse is in nature, but it depends on my will whether I establish it in the I. Nor can the will be unconditionally called to this action by the fact that the impulse lies in nature.... As to the return of the I into itself such a will is only a *possible* will ... the I is only the *possibility* of deputing itself to this or that object. Hence amongst the definite phases, which in this light are for the I *external*, the will chooses.

(Hegel 2001: 36, 38, §11, §14 [emphasis added])

One detects sympathy here for Kant's distinction between *hypothetical* and *categorical imperatives*. The former, as we have seen, concerns itself with satisfying desire, while the latter is a form of authority that is lifted beyond such feelings and into the realm of pure thought where the self can make decisions on how to act on the basis of a "higher" point of view. In short, the dictates of the categorical imperative (CI) are those of the free subject. It is on our capacity for such transcendental thinking that Kant's theory of morality is based, because in being so equipped, I am able to go beyond mere desires as final authorities on whether and how I should act and onto something qualitatively distinct from them. I can freely evaluate and choose between desires and ask myself what I should do and what desires I should act upon. It is from this that Kant thinks our ability to know the difference between right and wrong originates. As he explains in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1964), we judge ourselves against an ethical standard that seeks to do what is right independently of what our desires are at any particular time. In so doing, we truly become masters of our own destiny – self-governing and free (Kant 2008: 41).

Hegel agrees on the fundamentals of this with Kant. In *PR*, he argues that:

[I]t is important to be clear that the pure unconditioned self-direction of the will is the root of duty. This doctrine of volition attained to a firm basis and starting-point first of all in the Kantian philosophy through the thought of the infinite autonomy of the will.

(Hegel 2001: 114, §135)

But the understanding of liberty as freedom from external determining influences and constraints on thought is identical to Hegel's concept of God. This is a crucial point of departure from Kant, who made no such identification. His awareness that rational freedom made it possible for us to be moral was evidence of a divine reality for Kant, but he was utterly scathing of any attempts to use reason to uncover *knowledge* of God. This should make sense to us given what we know from earlier discussions about the synthetic *a priori*ism of the pure categories of understanding that were the necessary impositions onto our experience of the real world. The cost of the mind's formulation of reality-for-us was that it rendered reality-in-itself unknowable. It is something that we must posit as necessarily existent, but that is about as much as we can say. It cannot be philosophically *known*, only *thought*. This was Kant's restriction of philosophical knowledge to the domain of experience known as his *empirical metaphysics*. Just as this prevented knowledge of nature in itself via sense experience, so it prevented us from gaining knowledge about the nature of God. For this reason, Kant adhered to what we could call *providential Deism*, which was popular amongst some Enlightenment thinkers, who, despite their assault on so much of religious epistemology, could not quite bring themselves to abandon all facets of religious tradition. This was despite their absolute disdain for ontological proofs of the sort that medieval scholastic thinkers such as Anselm advanced. They were even dismissive of Descartes' attempts, despite their intellectual debt to his conception of the modern self.<sup>2</sup>

Hegel is, despite fairly vociferous Kantian objections, very attracted to ontological proofs (but not of the Anselmian type), because he thinks that reason's capacity to think the conditions of its own radical autonomy only makes sense if it also reveals knowledge about a reality outside of our minds that must be divine. As we will now see, this hinges on the question of whether freedom is to be understood dualistically (Kant) or non-dualistically (Hegel). Robert Wallace strongly alludes to non-duality when he says that 'Hegel's discussion of God, and God's relation to the world, is identical with his discussion on freedom' (Wallace 2005: 8). That is, when we understand something immanent, like how best to secure the conditions of our own freedom, we are at the same time gaining knowledge of something transcendent that is freedom's condition of possibility. Wallace belongs to a growing body of scholars who are once again reviving the orthodox Hegelian position that we take his whole system in its entirety – that means his ontologism, as well as his communitarianism, cultural theory and anti-naturalist social science. This will put Wallace on a collision course with Taylor, as we will see. I am broadly in agreement with the former in that Hegel's political ideas about freedom and justice make the most sense when coupled with his thinking about God. Moreover, to understand freedom (defined as self-governing rationality) as indistinguishable from God makes Hegel a rather important contributor to meta-post-secularism that I am defending, whereby we overcome the disenchantment of reality and truncation of rationality characteristic of PDM duality.<sup>3</sup> As we will see, Hegel's reformulation of the self on non-dualistic grounds, where the passions and desires are not phenomenological

opponents of the (positive) noumenal rational mind but rather emergent properties of rationality, will be central to meta-post-secularism, because in so doing, he formulates a panentheistic conception of God.

### Panentheism and non-duality

Our first task is to discuss how Hegel is a natural ally of PMR's critique of PDM disenchantment and narrowing rationality. How does he relate rational freedom of the self to God? And what are the implications for a PMR approach to eudemonia? In answering these questions, we need to start from his point of departure from Kant on the question of freedom. Although he shares Kant's rejection of modernist naturalism (formulated by Thomas Hobbes and developed by radical Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume and others), Hegel cannot agree with the dualistic premises upon which Kant's own theory of freedom is built. He sees no reason why rationality has to be opposed to the phenomenal world of sensuousness, desire, our basic drives and nature.

The key text in Hegel's rejection of naturalism is *PR*. The self seeks a rational standard by which to assess phenomenal causal desires according to which 'impulses should [be viewed as] phases of will in a rational system' (Hegel 2001: 41, §19). He is convinced that without such a standard, an agent cannot possibly be said to have a will at all, and agency becomes indistinguishable from a chain of mechanistic causes. But contra Kant, he thinks that the passions, desires and inclinations are not opposed to the rational will, because they are *emergent from it*. Hegel argues that the 'impulses, appetites, inclinations ... proceed from the rationality of the will and therefore [are] implicitly rational' (Hegel 2001: 36, §11). The drives that are part of our physical nature are thus part of a single rationality. This is a radical idea, because the former, far from being mechanistic unconscious causes, are themselves rational, part of a single rationality-in-itself.

To define materiality in this way is important, because Hegel is telling us that it exhibits rationality. Its ontological status is *spiritual*, therefore, because its essence is to realise itself as self-determining and therefore free. This will have revolutionary implications for Hegel's social and political theory, because it leads him to formulate a non-dualistic conception of the self in its relationship with social and political institutions. If the latter are to display rationality (i.e. to contribute to the realisation of self-determination in the world), then they must facilitate the realisation of the self-determination of the former and vice versa. In other words, in accordance with Hegel's non-dualistic adaptation of the Rousseauian and Kantian conception of freedom as *self*-determination, both the private sphere of the individual and the public sphere of social institutions must not be dependent on the realisation of goals defined *externally* to them. Like the material world generally, society is only rational to the extent to which it can freely reproduce itself.

Later in this chapter, we will explore the implications all of this has for Hegel's political thought. But it is important to first make the case that his

non-dualistic rationality has its origins in, and rests on, a panentheistic concept of God. The easiest way to define this metaphysic is to position it in relation to classical theism – the so-called “God of the philosophers”. In brief, classical theism originated in the Middle Ages as an attempt to penetrate rationally what those of the Abrahamic faiths already believed via scripture. Philosophically minded Judaistic, Islamic and Christian theologians posited God as utterly transcendent, simple, perfectly good, self-sufficient, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal and immutable in relation to the material world. He therefore is independent of, and unaffected by, His creation, which He creates freely and contingently from nothing. Although in essence, He is transcendent and changeless, God freely chooses to enter the world – to manifest immanently – in order to reveal Himself to human beings. It is a theo-metaphysical tradition associated in Christianity with Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and John Duns Scotus (1265–1308), as well as with the Reformation scholars Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). Its core principles are taken from Greek (and especially Platonic) philosophy, regarding the capacity to come to knowledge of God via reason in order to augment the supernatural revelation of the scriptures. I am going to refer to this tradition as *Anselmian theism* on the grounds that Anselm’s ontological proofs of the existence of God is perhaps the most clear-cut example of the classical theistic enterprise – the definition of God as Perfect Being.<sup>4</sup>

Panentheism is also influenced by Platonic thoughts about the divine. Like Anselmian theism, it posits an ontological distinction between God and the material world and views the former as transcendent. Unlike theism however, panentheists insert the crucial caveat that the world is ontologically contained within God in the sense that creatures such as human beings are not utterly other to Him, but are part of Him. In other words, all things are immanent within God, but He nevertheless transcends them. This distinction rests on a specific interpretation of Plato’s concept of the World Soul that departs from the Anselmian party line. Platonic duality posits unchanging and eternal Forms, which constitute the prototypal designs for the objects that make up the material world. The Anselmian theists appropriated Plato’s postulation that the former were transcendent of the latter. The World Soul functions to actualise the Forms in the physical world and in particular the Living Being – the prototype of cosmological life. While Living Being is a changeless and eternal Form, actual life in the universe is, by virtue of being a mere likeness of the former, subject to development. This was Plato’s account of cosmic time. Accordingly, matter and time are infused by the rationally ordering World Soul – they are made out of, and are part of, it. Anselmian theists and panentheists agree that Plato’s account of things is persuasive. What they cannot agree on is what Plato actually meant by his key concepts. In particular, there is divergence of opinion on the matter of whether the World Soul is part of God or just a device He uses to create the universe (Cooper 2007: 36). Theists point to the merely *participatory* role in Plato’s theology that matter and time play in relation to the Forms, which strongly implies that they mimic, but are not immanent within, God. Panentheists point to

Plato's propensity in *Timaeus* (Plato 2008) to seemingly identify eternal divine Reason with the World Soul. But as John W. Cooper has shown in his book on panentheism, the World Soul is more likely to be a 'quasi-divine creation' (Cooper 2007: 37) specifically generated by God for the act of Creation, so his philosophy is more easily adapted to Anselmian theism.

Nevertheless, the concept of the World Soul is cited by Cooper as the original inspiration for panentheistic theology (Cooper 2007: 38). In particular, it is the basis of Neoplatonism, which posits the Divine Mind, World Soul and the material universe as emanations from the eternal divine and thereby ontologically grounded in it (Cooper 2007: 39). The third-century theologian Plotinus (204–270) attempted to resolve Platonic ambiguities about the nature of God by presenting a unified account of reality centred on these divine hierarchical emanations. Like Plato, he postulated the One eternal divine essence that is transcendent of the emanations, but nevertheless contains them. In as far as he embraces a concept of transcendent God, Plotinus agrees with the basic Platonic and Anselmian principles. But he then departs from these traditions by using the distinction between the One and the World Soul to posit the former as transcendent in a much more radical sense. God in His eternal essence is defined as *beyond* being, non-Being or No-thing.<sup>5</sup> This is very different from Plato's immutable divine essence and Anselm's Perfect Being and is a crucial foundation of the panentheistic tradition to which Hegel belongs.

First, if God in his infinite essence is non-Being or No-thing, then it follows that He requires creation in order to exist. It is part of the divine essence that the world should and must exist. Emanations are therefore not simply contingent, but are necessary. Panentheism accordingly embraces *compatibilism*, which seeks to render freedom compatible with necessity. One is free when one acts in accordance with one's nature. This is the idea of freedom as self-determination – action free from external impediments or internal compulsion. We saw above how this is central to the Kantian and Rousseauian conceptions of human freedom that influenced Hegel's political thought. Panentheism is the application of this idea of freedom to God. God *freely* creates the world, because it is part of His nature to do so. But it also logically follows from defining Divine freedom in this way that it is impossible for God not to create the world. His nature is to be eternally self-revelatory activity (Lauer 1982: 159). Once again, it is important to emphasise that this panentheistic principle is distinguished from any possible pantheistic implications of identifying the world as a necessary expression of divine nature by Plotinus' positing of the transcendence (as well as immanence) of the World Soul (Cooper 2007: 42–43). In other words, although all things are contained within the One (i.e. the immanence of the divine), pantheists assert that all of its emanations are ontologically distinct from it (thereby permitting divine transcendence).

This way of thinking about Divine freedom as self-determination is therefore closely linked to thinking that God is both immanent and transcendent, and it is a connection that is important to non-duality. We have just seen how Platonic duality rests on positing matter as merely participating in the divine in the sense

of its mimicry of the Forms. The divine One itself remains immutable and infinitely transcendent. The Anselmian adaption of this principle of divine transcendence was the means whereby classical theism could secure philosophical corroboration with the Christian theological duality contained in the scriptures. But if we are to understand God's creation in terms of compatibilism, then, at the very least, we must revise what it means by matter's "participation" in the divine. If panentheists are right that it is a necessary expression of the divine, then "participate" must mean much more than mere reflection of the Forms. It must mean taking a vital part *in* the divine *itself* (or Himself), otherwise a compatibilist definition of God's freedom will make little sense.

Hegel's own thoughts on panentheism help to clarify and further deepen both compatibilist and non-dualistic approaches to understanding the nature of God. He was influenced by Neoplatonic non-Being, but he was also impressed by later panentheistic attempts to appropriate Anselmian Perfect Being for panentheistic purposes and in particular the concept of *Maximal Being* developed by Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). Rather than identifying divine Oneness with reality beyond being (non-Being), Nicholas thinks it should be equated with Being as such (*Absolute Being*). It (or He) is also equated with infinity, because in order for Him to be maximal, He must be without limitation, externality or otherness. In this way, Nicholas argued that in order for the finite to be included as part of the divine, we must define God as Maximal Being (Cooper 2007: 53). If Anselm had been logically consistent with his idea of God as a being greater than which cannot be conceived, he would have realised that the sort of God he was envisaging could not possibly be reconciled with theistic duality and for a very simple reason. If God is Maximal Being, then to posit finitude as external to His essence is to embrace an incoherent view of infinity, because it is to identify a dimension of reality that is not part of Him. This is to limit Him and so embrace a spurious conception of infinity. It follows that in order for the Anselmian concept of Perfect Being to be logically cogent, it must involve the panentheistic (and non-dualistic) conception of *True Infinity* where all reality is included in the Infinite. Accordingly, panentheistic emanation theory was to involve the distinction between Maximal Being (God) and the infinite universe, which was defined as a 'contracted maximal' (Cooper 2007: 56) of plural, diverse and finite beings. In Him, all such plurality and difference is negated. This way of distinguishing between types of infinity enabled Nicholas to retain the panentheistic idea of a transcendent (fixed and immutable) God, who nevertheless contains creation within Him. In short, Nicholas combined Neoplatonic panentheistic emanation theory with the Anselmian view of God as Perfect Being in such a way as to avoid Anselm's own error of formulating a spurious concept of infinity. The result was the dialecticising of Neoplatonic emanation theory where the created finite world of flux and diversity was ultimately harmonised and reconciled with the Divine One. God is the One Infinite Being in Whom all opposites that emanate from Him are unified.

The problem with Nicholas' concept of God as True Infinity, of which he was well aware, is that, on the one hand, He is Maximal Being, but also, on the other,

He is the negation of all determinate finite difference, which seems to suggest the Neoplatonic view of Him as the negation of all being (God as No-thing). Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) – the other major panentheist to influence Hegel – offered a solution. He defined No-thing as, within itself, the infinite potential and freedom to be – a craving to Be in the sense of unifying with its opposite (Cooper 2007: 59). So God as One contains within Himself both negative (No-thing, which includes irrationality, darkness, chaos and wrath) and positive (craving to Be, which includes reason, light, order and love) aspects. Presumably, freedom and necessity would be additional components of No-thing and Being respectively for Böhme and so his positing of God as intrinsically dialectical in Essence demands a compatibilist view of Divine freedom. Indeed, the implications of this dialectic on the panentheistic view of creation as divine self-determination are made clear when Böhme tells us that God's will to Be is grasped as His will to self-knowledge (Cooper 2007: 60). That is, it is in His nature to create, because it is in His nature to know Himself. Rather than dialectical theology being limited to divine emanation, by positing God's Essence as unfolding self-knowledge, Böhme makes it key to our understanding of God's very nature. Böhme then posited a third aspect necessary to synthesise these opposites, which he called Spirit. We have a Triune conception of God – paralleling and claiming to fully ontologise Christian Trinitarian theology – that thereby renders Him fully knowable. This overcame the Anselmian belief (shared reluctantly by Nicholas) that His transcendent Essence was ultimately beyond human comprehension.

With Böhme, we therefore have a conception of God as self-revelatory (*Deus Revelatus*), grasped as divine self-fulfilment through dialectical teleological development in nature and history. This interpretation occurs within a Christian framework, because it submits to a Trinitarian construal. It is also panentheistic, because it is a construal that is constituted narratively.

### **Modern panentheism: from substance to subject metaphysics**

For Hegel, Böhme's dialectical resolution meant that the concept of God as True Infinity could be set on solid ontological foundations. This is central not only to Hegel's theory of God and freedom, but to his entire philosophical system, including his treatment of nature, being, subjectivity and reality. Together with Nicholas, Böhme provides Hegel with the core ideas with which he could arm himself in his quest to overturn the dualistic presuppositions of Kant's dismissal of rational knowledge (the property of finite human minds) of the Infinite Being of God. Nor is Hegel satisfied with the somewhat limited ambitions that meta-theologians tended to have for reason, as exhibited in the conclusion by Anselmian theists and most panentheists (including Nicholas) alike that, to a fairly large degree, God's own nature as Infinite was impenetrable.

The influence of Böhme's dialectical panentheism can be seen in Hegel's meta-theology of Spirit. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the latter departs from the standard Anselmian definition, which denotes a particular

Person of the Trinity and reconceives it as divine revelation in itself (O'Regan 1994: 29–30). In other words, Spirit refers to God as the process of revelation, rather than to one of the three Persons of the Godhead. In this sense, Hegel appropriates the symbols of Trinitarian dogma in service of his panentheistic metaphysic. I think this is the best way to come to terms with Hegel's famous insistence, contra Kantian duality, that the relationship between Biblical theology and philosophy is rehabilitated as a matter of urgency. Biblical symbols, including those of the Trinity, are key symbolic representations of that which philosophy grasps logically.

We know that for Kant, noumena refer to areas of reality that we cannot philosophically know anything about, but must presuppose exist in order for our experiences to be possible. We can have *practical*, rather than *theoretical* knowledge of them. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he posits the non-rational object-in-itself – *negative noumena* (Kant 1998: A286/B342–343, 379–380) – that transcends human experience that is the presupposition of the pure categories of the understanding – *positive noumena* (Kant 1998: A248/B305, 346). The former is our awareness or “mere thought” of a “something” quite beyond our mode of comprehension, whereas the latter are concepts of objects in general (i.e. beyond our grasp of them empirically). In this way, positive and negative noumena provide us with a crucial “boundary concept” that limits our mode of cognition and allows us to distinguish between the object-for-us (which we can know via the application of the pure categories of the understanding to experience) and the transcendent object-in-itself (which can only be thought) (Allison 1983: 238; Gardner 2002: 204). Upon this, his dualistic system of thought – the chasm between the self's experience of the world and the world as it really is – is based. We know this to be the radicalisation and deepening of the self characteristic of his Transcendental Ego where we are raised, by virtue of positive noumena, above the domain of experience to that of rational freedom.

*The Critique of Practical Reason* ([1788] 1956) is the text where the implications of this duality are explored. We have already seen how it works for Kant's notion of the radical autonomy of the (disembodied) moral self. The Transcendental Ego gives us practical (pre-sensual) knowledge of morality that can order and direct moral behaviour in the same way as the synthetic *a priori* categories order our experiences of matter. Our capacity for rational autonomy is evidence that we are able to attain the highest moral good. But this is not possible unless we are immortal and there exists a higher moral judge (God). We have sufficient *practical* reason to posit His existence. Kant accordingly thinks that religious symbols function to represent the thought of the infinity of the divine in terms which the mind can understand via feeling. Religious consciousness of the divine (scripture, acts of worship, etc.) is an awareness of extra-sensual reality to be sure, but Kant insists that this can only be known in an immediate sense, rather than grasped conceptually or rationally via philosophical study (Cooper 2007: 92; Kant 1956: bk. 2).

By contrast, in accordance with Hegel's anti-naturalist monistic idea that that which is grasped in thought is an emergent property of rationality, the

relationship between religious symbolism and that which it represents is a very different one. The content of religion and philosophy are identical. The difference between them lies in the former's status as representations of the divine, which philosophical research grasps conceptually (Lauer 1982: Ch. 1). Accordingly, Hegel is rather dismissive of providential Deistic Christianity, as he tells us in the *Encyclopaedia*:

...immediate consciousness of God goes no further than telling us *that* He is: to tell us *what* He is would be an act of cognition, involving mediation. So that God as an object of religion is expressly narrowed down to the indeterminate supersensible, God in general: and the significance of religion is reduced to a minimum ... we might well wonder at the poverty of an age which can see a gain in the merest pittance of religious consciousness count as a gain and which in its church ... [has] the alter dedicated to *the unknown God*.

(Hegel 1892: §73, 136 [emphasis in original])

To reduce God, as Kant does, to the status of a mere postulate of practical reason is to posit duality once again. Whereas above we have seen Kant's distinction between the rational will and the passions rest on dualistic foundations, so his positing of the unknowable God accessible only via faith opens up an unbridgeable gap between the finite and the infinite, humanity and God. Kant is accordingly criticised for promoting the worship of an unknown God (Lauer 1982: 33; O'Regan 1994: 40).

As part of the narrative process of divine self-revelation (Spirit), the relationship that Hegel identifies between religious thought and philosophical knowledge is key to divine teleological self-fulfilment. Here we see the full panentheistic thrust of Hegel's compatibilist reconstruction of Christianity. Grasped as Spirit, God cannot fail to disclose Himself, and the human act of raising ourselves from immediate to substantive knowledge in the development from faith to philosophical contemplation enables Hegel to move beyond not only the dualism of Kantian theology, but also the mere descriptivism of the Anselmian tradition. It is not enough that God *chooses* to reveal Himself (via scriptural revelation for Kant or scriptural revelation augmented by rationality for classical theism), we have a reason why He *must logically* do so in order to Be. This is, for example, expressed in Christological terms as the rational content of the Incarnation and Passion. God becomes enfleshed in Christ because it is part of His nature to enter into the world and suffer with it. As Stephen Houlgate has argued, this strongly suggests that, for Hegel, immanence, suffering and death are part of the divine nature, so that

finitude itself belongs to God's nature.... [W]e recognise that God is only God through sharing in human suffering and giving himself up to death. It is this that lets us see that the true nature of God is not to be a transcendent judge or an impassive supreme being, but to let go of himself and be incarnate.<sup>6</sup>

(Houlgate 1991: 220)

Despite the fundamental divergences from the Kantian position, the Hegelian system – and its non-duality in particular – is, in an important sense, constructed on the revolutionary foundations of the Transcendental Ego. The philosophical context of this revolution began with the Spinozan radicalisation of the ontology of divine substance that had sustained the Anselmian tradition. The scholastics had defined God as substance in the sense that He was a fixed, infinite, supreme Being Who depended on no other thing for His existence. Spinoza, developing Cartesian logic, stated that the only accurate definition of “substance” was a thing that was not dependent on other things for its existence. He argued, contra Anselmian theology, that there was only *one* substance that fitted the bill (God) and that all things (nature, human beings, etc.) are merely aspects of it, thus rendering them identical to it. This is known as *dual aspect monism* (Clayton 2004: 80). But if God is just “substance”, then his personhood cannot be sustained (Lauer 1982: 155). This was the basis of Spinoza’s pantheistic reconstruction of theism’s ontology of substance. God remains static, but loses His Personhood. Kant’s reassertion of duality and personhood against Spinoza took the form of the Transcendental Ego. It, too, was revolutionary, because it enabled philosophers in the post-Kantian tradition to think of metaphysics in terms not of divine substance (Anselmian duality or Spinozan monism), but of *subjectivity* – a process that, ironically for Kant, begins the move away from the ontology of the disembodied subject.

The metaphysics of subjectivity is, in short, the foundation for post-Kantian historical and dialectical panentheism. Post-Kantians have teased out the implications of Kant’s concept of positive noumena (i.e. the pre-conscious capacity of the mind to order reality). Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), for example, was particularly taken by the assertion in *The Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant 1956: Bk. 2, Ch. 2, sec. 7) that God Himself was possessed of a Transcendental Ego, which He uses to communicate with humanity via our own reason. Fichte thought that this correlation between divine and human Egos suggested the possibility of dissolving the Kantian duality. In *The Science of Knowledge* ([1794] 1982), he insisted that the human soul and nature do not have the qualities of “in-themselves”, but are rather emanations of the pre-conscious Ego for the purpose of providing a realm for its moral–rational activity. In other words, the Ego is not a static substance exhibiting an “in-itself” quality beyond experience. Rather, the phenomenal realm is posited in relation to the Ego as the domain of its moral–rational activity. Thus, rationality and morality are not disembodied from the domain of experience, but are integral to it. Under these terms, the Ego is reconceptualised as an *active* world-constituting subject. Moreover, this activity was also dialectical in that the Ego necessarily posits its opposite (Non-ego) in order to synthesise with it via moral–rational activity. The Ego must, furthermore, be infinite, because Fichte thought that individual finite egos of human beings are part of the domain of moral–rational activity and so it cannot itself be finite. In *The Vocation of Man* ([1800] 1987), his concept of God makes clear that the Absolute Ego is identical to the human ego in the sense that all are united within It (Fichte 1987: 107–108).

Fichtean subjective idealism therefore initiates the post-Kantian reconstitution of ontology as that of the embodied subject. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854) utilised Fichte's location of human consciousness in the divine to form his theory of moral autonomy. Fichte had pinpointed another key weakness in the Kantian position: to posit the moral self as disembodied simply involved substituting one form of determinism (by nature under the terms of Enlightenment naturalism) with a dualistic *moral* determinism. Unless human beings are the architects of (as well as being subject to) the moral law, they cannot be morally autonomous in any meaningful sense. In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* ([1800] 1978), Schelling endorsed the Fichtean position that the finite ego must be thought of as a constituent part of the divine architect of the moral law (Schelling 1978: 206). In short, the whole Kantian idea of freedom as self-determination cannot work on the basis of the disembodied self. It only makes sense if we are somehow part of God. But contra Fichte, Schelling contended that beginning with the creative act of the self-unfolding, the Infinite Ego/Subject risks losing sight of finite subjectivity (Cooper 2007: 95–96). This was due to the former's logical contention that it was impossible for the moral-rational activity of the Infinite (that posits nature and the finite subject) to be Itself finite. If God is Infinite, then He cannot be a personal Being, because to be so would be to limit Him in the same way as human persons are limited. Similarly, to say that finite minds are simply the pluralistic manifestation of the One Infinite Ego is to undermine their personhood. Fichte's concept of the moral autonomy of the embodied self, in panentheistic style, was the attempt to maintain the distinction between finite ego and Infinite Ego, despite the former's containment in the latter. But most scholars think that he eventually loses sight of the finite subject by defining the Absolute as Infinite Ego and starting from there (Cooper 2007: 94–96). To resolve this problem, Schelling returned to Spinoza. From Schelling's point of view, it seemed that Fichte had merely substituted Infinite Ego for Spinozan Substance, so as to make the move to the ontology of the subject. To preserve a coherent sense of finite self-determination, Schelling replaced subjective with *objective* idealism.

But this was not a return to the philosophy of substance. Schelling was not sympathetic to the pantheistic thrust of Spinoza's philosophy, because he rejected dual aspect monism. What is crucial in distancing Schelling from Spinoza is his attempt to incorporate Fichte's point that we are participants in divine moral autonomy into the Spinozan view of the Absolute Infinite. This meant that God cannot be fully realised but is developing, because if He were complete, given that we are part of His moral self-determination, then it would follow that we, too, would be completely determined. We would be completely free. Given that this is manifestly not so, we can only conclude that God, contra Spinoza and Anselmian theism, must be existentially *historical*. Indeed, for Schelling, He doesn't even fully exist at all until human history has begun (Schelling 1978: 212). He posits the progressive dialectical unity of the Ego and Non-ego as the manifestation in nature and human history of the self-actualising essence. Just as human freedom depends on our moral-rational activity being

part of God, so conversely His self-actualisation and freedom requires the realisation of human freedom. The incorporation of intra-related divine and human moral self-determination was the way in which Schelling rendered abstract Spinozan Absolute Substance dialectical and historical and, in doing so, moved beyond pantheism into modern panentheism (Schelling 1936: 22).<sup>7</sup>

To summarise, we might label the pre-Hegelian non-dualistic theologies in the following way. Spinoza's elimination of personhood from the Absolute is *substance pantheism*. Fichte's dissolution of the Transcendental Ego as substance is *subject pantheism*. His attempt to retain the divine–human distinction was panentheistic in intent, but his failure to do so seems to push his system in the direction of pantheism. Schelling's historicisation of Absolute Substance via human moral–rational activity makes him an inadvertent *substance panentheist*.

Hegel was deeply inspired by Schelling's idea of divine dialectical self-realisation in human history and nature, but he rejected substance panentheism. It was not at all clear how divine–human intra-relationality could result from Schelling's objective idealist positing of simple Absolute Identity as the starting point distinct from all of the diversities of the world. Ultimately, Schelling, despite his efforts, relies on the abstract and static conception of the Absolute that he inherited from Spinoza. The notion of God as self-actualising in the finite world results in a gap between this dialectical manifestation and His Absolute Essence, which is in itself fairly stable and simple. Hegel's response was to make finitude itself *part of* the Absolute, thereby positing dialectic as a dynamic feature of the Absolute *in itself*. It is in bridging this gap that Hegel is able to argue for the identity between philosophical knowledge and theology that we saw above, which is of such importance to his critique of duality. This is so because the rationality of the dialectic – divine self-realisation and understanding – becomes part of the divine essence itself, thereby rendering God knowable via philosophical speculative logic. It was precisely because Schelling defined God's essential nature in terms of the simple Absolute (Substance) that he resisted elevating philosophy to such prestigious status and insisted that artistry and religious faith were as close as we could get to grasping God's Essence. As we will now see, Hegel's rejection of Schelling on this issue was the basis of what I am going to call his *dialectical subject panentheism*.

### **The ontological primacy of freedom: being as “true infinity” in Hegel’s logic**

To understand Hegel's unique contribution to panentheism in this regard requires us to keep in mind his innovative take on subject metaphysics, which by virtue of its final dissolution of substance marked the completion of the move away from Spinoza to a fully-fledged subjectivism. To posit Being as divine self-revelatory activity meant that post-Kantian thinking about the relationship between the divine and the material would have to decisively break from the old-fashioned idea in natural theology that the very fact of nature's intelligibility was evidence of a divine “signature” upon it. That is, the intelligibility of nature that suggested

the presence of a non-material reality behind it that is its cause was not something that is simply *there*. In and of itself, matter is unconscious. Rather, Hegel thinks that it is intrinsically intelligible only because it is *communicated* (Lauer 1982: 129). From what we have said so far about the Hegelian system, this subtle but crucial distinction makes sense because we know that, for Hegel, the purpose of nature and human history is divine self-conscious activity; they exist as God's means of communicating with Himself. And so the intelligibility of finite reality is not a property it has in and of itself, but only in its communicative function as an internal aspect of the divine. This is its condition of possibility of being at all. The "being" of nature and history is therefore *communicated being*.

Nature and human history as communicated being helps us grasp what it means to say that the finite – along with all its polarities and differentiations – is an integral part of the infinite. For Schelling, it is one thing to say that this differentiation is a necessary part of divine self-understanding, but it is quite another to posit differentiation as itself part of God's Essence. However, this is precisely what Hegel attempts to do, and he does so by invoking the concept of True Infinity (hereafter TI) that we saw above. Without such an inclusion – to limit dialectical flux to rendering nature and human history as synonymous with necessary divine self-realisation – is to embrace a spurious conception of infinity where God is bounded, thus rendering His very concept incoherent.

As Robert M. Wallace has shown in his excellent *Hegel's Philosophy of Reality, Freedom and God* (2005), Hegel's understanding of TI is a response to Kant's duality of freedom and nature. We have seen this above as the consumption of nature by freedom that is the former's non-duality. In this sense, nature depends on something that goes beyond it – freedom – in order for it to properly *be* at all (Wallace 2005: 51). To define freedom in terms of the transcendence of thought from determinism is evidence of the influence of the Kantian categorical imperative (CI), because we know how Kant contended that the prerequisite for freedom is the ability of the self to transcend the empirical determinisms of nature (Beiser 2005: 155–156; Houlgate 1991: 43–44; Wallace 2005: 49–50). We saw when we looked at the *PR* that this was freedom as self-determining thought. But to also insist that freedom could be located within nature was a radical departure from the CI. This was Hegel's radical move beyond Kant where the determinants of nature (including those of human nature – passion and desire) are posited as emergent properties of rationality itself. It is in this sense that nature must be seen as containing freedom. And so Kant was right to say that freedom goes beyond nature, but wrong to draw dualistic conclusions from this. Rather than grasping this term in an oppositional sense (nature *opposing* freedom), "going beyond" is an internal feature of how freedom renders nature real (i.e. so it can *be*).

This association between freedom as rational self-determination and being is crucial for our purposes here, because it is the foundation of Hegel's entire system, including his panentheism. In order to understand his difficulties with Kant in relation to freedom, we need to look at his critique of the latter's dualistic logic. In short, free thought, in order to be genuinely self-determining,

must be autonomous of all external restraining influences – i.e. it must be *presuppositionless*. In doing this, Hegel turns the logic of Cartesian scepticism against thought itself and, in so doing, undermines formal logic and concomitantly the dualism of the entire Cartesian system. Kant's empirical metaphysics (true to the fundamentals of Descartes' foundationalism) had correctly posited the transcendental categories as necessary preconditions of our experience and knowledge of the world. But this did not mean that the categories were *derived* from self-determining thought, only that they must be present given the structure of our experience. The categories are constrained by the externality that is a pre-supposed character of objective experience. To define freedom in terms of that which it opposes or that which is external to it is to say that it is reliant on that opposition which, in turn, creates a dependency. In the *EL*, Hegel says of this approach that it 'could only get hold of the finite forms as they were suggested by experience taking them as given, instead of deducing them scientifically' (Hegel 1892: §78, 141–142). By contrast, his preferred approach is not to deduce the categories of thought from such presuppositions, but to

insist on science being preceded by universal doubt, or a total absence of presupposition ... in the resolve that wills pure thought, this requirement is accomplished by freedom which, abstracting from everything, grasps its pure abstraction, the simplicity of thought.

(Hegel 1892: §78, 142)

Much of the difficulty Kant gets into is due to the fact that his oppositional view of freedom implies that the finite and infinite are external to one another. His oppositional conception of free thought rests on a conception of finite forms 'as they were suggested by experience'. The Kantian definition of "finitude" is entirely predicated on how they appear in the structure of immediate experience to the *exclusion of the infinite*. This is precisely what leads Kant to think that the phenomenal world of finite forms (nature-for-us) is separate from, and opposed to, the noumenal world of infinite self-determining reason. Ultimately, the inadequacies of an empirical metaphysical application of the concept of freedom as self-determining thought lie in its dualistic underpinning. In the *EL*, Hegel outlines his case against dualism:

Dualism, in putting an insuperable opposition between finite and infinite, fails to note the simple circumstance that the infinite is thereby only one of two, and is reduced to a particular, to which the finite forms the other particular. Such an infinite, which is only a particular, is co-terminous with the finite which makes for it a limit and barrier: it is not what it ought to be, that is, the infinite, but is only finite.

(Hegel 1892: §95, 176–177)

To insist, when one talks about the infinite and finite, that 'there must be an abyss, an impassable gulf between the two' (Hegel 1892: §95, 177) is to say that

the finite excludes the infinite and vice versa. But Hegel tells us that this equates to rendering the finite absolute, because to limit the infinite in this way is to render it logically *non-infinite* and so dissolve it into its opposite. This is the concept of the spurious infinite we saw above that has hamstrung Anselmian theism, pantheism and Fichtean and Schellingian panentheism. And so if we are to make the most of Kant's astute linkage of freedom with the logic of infinite thought, Hegel is sure that we need TI. Hegel defines the latter in unambiguous terms as that which 'consists in being at home with itself in its other, or, if enunciated as a process, in coming to itself in its other' (Hegel 1892: §94, 175).

Now, the connection between freedom as rational self-determination and being is that the criterion for the latter is identical with the criterion for free thought. That is, in order for anything in the real world to exist, *it must have the character of (infinite) thought*, rather than just mere (i.e. unconscious) existence (Wallace 2005: 54). It is in this sense that nature is communicated being – the communication of infinite freedom in matter. And so being, just like thought, must be presuppositionless. In order for thought to be free, it must be self-determining; and in order for it to be self-determining, it must be presuppositionless (Houlgate 1991: 44). To avoid his categories being constrained by determinations of formal logic (e.g. such as those of empirical metaphysics), Hegel insists that thought must begin with a pure, indeterminate and empty view of itself (i.e. *abstracted* from determining influences). But as he tells us in the *Science of Logic* ([1812–1816] 1969, hereafter *SL*), to think of indeterminate, purely abstract being is identical to thinking of nothing (i.e. it is *no-thing* or *non-being*). They are therefore identical because the former is 'pure indeterminate-ness and emptiness. There is *nothing* to be to be intuited in it.... Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*' (Hegel 1969: 82). Conversely, if nothing is pure being, then it cannot be simply nothing. Rather it must *be* nothing (i.e. it is no-thing or non-being) or as Hegel tells us '*nothing is* (exists) ... the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure *being*' (Hegel 1969: 82). Paradoxically, Hegel points out that the beginning of *determinate* difference between being and nothing is located *within their indeterminate* (immediate) difference. If pure being immediately collapses into its opposite – nothingness – as soon as it is thought and vice versa, then both being and nothingness are *transitions* between each other. So the thought of pure being is not, after all, a purely indeterminate *is*, but is, rather, a *becoming* – it is the process of becoming itself or as Hegel says '[t]heir truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*' (Hegel 1969: 83). This is the bare beginning of determinate being where 'being and nothing ... sink from their initially imagined *self-subsistence* to the status of *moments*, which are still *distinct* but at the same time are *sublated*' (Hegel 1969: 105). But if being and nothing vanish into each other in this process, then it logically follows that the process itself – becoming – (which obviously is itself dependent on the distinction between them) also vanishes. And so becoming is 'inherently self-contradictory, because the determinations which it unites within itself are opposed to each

other; but such a union destroys itself.... This result is the vanishedness of becoming' (Hegel 1969: 106). But it cannot vanish into nothingness, because to do so 'would only be a relapse into one of the already sublated determinations, not the *resultant* of nothing *and being*' (Hegel 1969: 106 [emphasis added]). Thus, becoming is a

unity of being and nothing that has settled into a stable oneness [which is] being ... yet [a being which is] no longer a determination on its own [i.e. undifferentiated being] but as a determination *of the whole* [i.e. the bare determination of being and nothing].

(Hegel 1969: 106 [emphasis added])

And so becoming 'has the form of the one-sided immediate unity of these moments [i.e. it becomes *being* rather than nothing and therefore] is *determinate being*' (Hegel 1969: 106) – the stability that endows being with the chance to be genuinely "in-itself", rather than constantly sliding into its opposite, while at the same time preserving the truth of the categories of being and nothing.

This process of achieving determinate being by going beyond nothing and being, but preserving their truth content is called *determinate negation* (Hegel 1969: 107). Accordingly, the latter terms are conceptually superseded (and therefore an object existing as a determinate being) by "negation" and "reality" respectively. First, an object acquires *specific* qualities that differentiate it from other qualities that are conceptually related to it. That is, the extent to which dependency is evident, qualities of objects achieve the status of determinations by being *negations* of that which they are dependent on. As Wallace explains, this takes the form of qualities of things existing within a

conceptual space, such as being one particular quality is *not* being the other qualities that are conceptually related to it ... 'red', for example ... belongs in the conceptual space of *color*, thus it is *not being* the color 'blue', the color 'yellow' and so on.

(Wallace 2005: 60 [emphasis added])

Conversely, "reality" designates qualities something has by virtue of itself, rather than by virtue of its dependence on other things – i.e. its status as a determinate being by virtue of its *self*-relation. The degree to which something can achieve self-relatedness is a key measure of its *reality* for Hegel – an object that is fully self-related is "more real" than something which depends to a greater or lesser extent on its relations to others. In this way, I interpret Hegelian ontology as positing the *primacy of freedom over material finite being*. Within this non-dualistic system, it is the latter that is the subordinate element in the dialectical unity. This assertion will be of relevance to the thrust of my discussion of Blochean process materialism in the next chapter, so it is worth being aware of it now.<sup>8</sup>

Negation and reality at this level of determinate being are necessarily related to each other by Hegel's famous 'negation of the negation' (Hegel 1969: 116). A

quality or object first exists as a negation of something else, as we have just seen. But it can also exist as the negation of that negation – i.e. it owes its existence to it *not* being merely the opposite of something else. But just as the vanishing of becoming does not involve a relapse into indeterminate nothingness, so the negation of the negation is not a mere elimination of the original negation – a return to simple determinate being (Hegel 1969: 116) – but rather constitutes a new conceptual relationship between them. This is, of course, entirely in keeping with Hegelian logic – negation is not simply denial (i.e. the denial of the initial negation), but rather sublation, where the initial negation is superseded. Thus, the negation of the negation heralds a conceptual relationship between it and the original negation. It is a new level of determinate being, because a new contrast is formed – a ‘second-level contrast’ (Wallace 2005: 65) – between the initial negation and the negation of the negation (in the sense that the latter *is* the negation of all first order qualities such as “redness”, etc.). If we follow Hegelian logic correctly, then we have to dispense with the idea that there can ever be anything that exists simply “in itself” or, conversely, that there can be anything that is “simply other” because to be self-related requires the re-emergence and reconfiguration of the idea of otherness and vice versa. Thus,

something ... stands ... in relation to its otherness.... The otherness is at once contained in it and also still separate from it; it is *being-for-other* ... but as self-related in *opposition* to its relation to other ... [it is] *being-in-itself*.

(Hegel 1969: 119 [emphasis in original])

The importance of summarising Hegel’s thinking about the earliest stages in the emergence of being, non-being and reality for our purposes concerns an immensely un-Kantian point about what all this means for the concept of selfhood. And the determination of the self can only ever be understood in terms of its opposite – the realm of the non-self. We may call this latter, therefore, the realm of “other-determination”. If self-relatedness depends on the contrastive relationship between negation and the negation of the negation, then the very concept of selfhood as infinite autonomy is predicated on a process intimately connected with the “otherness” of self. That is, contra a dualistic approach to the issue of the autonomy of the self (which presumes that it exists quite independently and transcendent of the realm of other-determination – i.e. nature) in the Hegelian system, the very notion that they can be distinguished is illogical. Furthermore, that this struggle to be self-related is of absolutely central importance in the ontology of the subject is revealed in Hegel’s remark that this process constitutes early evidence of the *beginning* of the subject: ‘The negative of the negative is, as *something*, only the beginning of the subject [*Subjekt*] – being-within-itself, only as yet quite indeterminate’ (Hegel 1969: 115 [emphasis in original]). With the intra-relatedness of self and other-determination providing the very life-force of the emergence of the subject, the final break with the metaphysic of Substance that hamstrung Schelling’s panentheism is complete with the Hegelian system.

I will explore this important relation between selfhood and negation in a moment, but first we need to consider the implications in all of this for the Hegelian concepts of finitude and infinity. As a consequence of intra-relatedness, as we have seen, selfhood is determined by the “other” of non-selfhood and vice versa. But if being-in-itself can only be grasped in terms of its relation to its other (as a being-for-other), then how can it possibly be said to have any *in-itself* qualities at all? Does the intra-relatedness of being not effectively dissolve selfhood? Not, Hegel tells us, if we grasp selfhood in terms of finitude. This is the idea that being-in-itself can be sustained by something if it can successfully *disconnect its relations* to other things –that is, if it can dissolve its other-relatedness. This is ‘*the ceasing of the other in it*’ (Hegel 1969: 126 [emphasis in original]), and it is achieved when something becomes finite. As such, it is the act of limiting its being, so as to render otherness irrelevant to it. But surely to posit being-in-itself’s condition of possibility as involving a limit is merely to reintroduce the issue of relatedness – the relation, this time, of limitation? And so finitude merely reconceptualises being-for-other, rather than surpasses it. Hegel agrees, saying that

[i]n order that the limit which is in something as such should be a limitation, something must at the same time in its own self transcend the limit, it must in its own self *be related to the limit as to something which is not*.

(Hegel 1969: 132 [emphasis in original])

So finite being must involve relatedness if it is to enjoy the status of being-for-itself after all, and it is a relatedness that is borne out of its essence as a being-in-itself as limitation. In other words, in order for an object to be what it is by virtue of itself, it must embrace the act of its negation by seeing negation in terms of limitation. If being-in-itself as finitude depends on limitation and limitation is a relation, then it is a relation that recognises limitation as an obstruction to a more complete, fuller being-in-itself. This recognition is the desire to overcome the obstruction – this is what Hegel means when he says that finitude’s relatedness to “other” in its limitation involves transcendence *of* this limitation. The upshot of all this is that for Hegel, the finitude of nature, human history and phenomenal reality generally is in its very essence the attempt of that which is finite to transcend *itself* (because these infinite qualities to which it aspires are, if we follow Hegelian logic, *part of it*).

This, then, is the Hegelian response to the Kantian dualistic approach to reality. As we have seen, empirical metaphysics involves a phenomenal definition of being. Under the terms of the Kantian system, there are two kinds of being, because there are two kinds of reality – our conception (i.e. knowledge) of being and reality is constrained by the objective structure of experience and so nature (including our passions and desires) becomes the domain of being-for-us. The concerns of the CI (i.e. reason, moral duty and self-determination), by contrast, are lifted beyond phenomenal being/reality and defined in opposition to it, therefore creating a noumenal world of being and reality-*in-itself*.

Hegel's argument is that when Kant speaks about "being", he deploys the common sense idea that self-reliance is a key predicate of it (freedom as being-for-itself), in which case the Kantian freedom–determinism duality involves an incoherent conception of being-for-us. As we have just seen, finite being cannot sustain itself without its *intra-connectedness* with the infinite. By dissolving duality, as the Hegelian system does, finite being not only *does* contain freedom as it is defined in the CI (i.e. as self-determination), but anything to which we can attribute the qualities of existence at all *must* contain it. Finite reality – nature and history – should therefore be seen as the *process* of being; the process of reality's very emergence. This is what I meant above when I said that Hegel's point of departure from Kant was in his insistence that rationality and freedom, far from being external to nature, are emergent properties of it – the type of terminology that features in the *PR*.

### **Hegel's dialectical subject panentheism: God as TI**

It seems, therefore, that when Hegel speaks of finitude as limited being/reality, he means that it is a limitation of freedom in the sense that it is only partly able to achieve the status of "being", because it is only partly able to demonstrate its self-dependence. Given finite objects' close affinity with each other in terms of the qualities they share (being-for-other), they rely for their freedom on a higher "other" – i.e. infinity. The purely oppositional conception of finite being that philosophical dualism presupposes is therefore seen to be fallacious by defining its being as the overcoming of this oppositional status – it exists only as its self-transcendence. But because the finite ultimately fails to complete self-transcendence, it is deemed to be *less real* than the infinite. But this does not mean that Hegel lapses, after all, back into a dualistic conception of infinity. Remember all of this discussion of "the infinite" involves TI, as opposed to the spurious infinite characteristic of dualistic thought. Just as the finite is only its own transcendence, so the infinite is only the self-transcendence of the finite. This organic intra-dependency is a radical break from ontological duality:

...the unity of the finite and the infinite is not an external bringing together of them, nor an incongruous combination alien to their own nature in which there would be joined together determinations inherently separate and opposed, each having a simple affirmative being independent of the other and incompatible with it; but each is in its own self this unity, and this only as a *sublating* of its own self in which neither would have the advantage over the other of having an in-itself and an affirmative determinate being ... finitude *is* only as a transcending of itself; it therefore contains infinity, the other of itself. Similarly, infinity *is* only as a transcending of the finite; it therefore essentially contains its other and is, consequently, in its own self the other of itself. The finite is not sublated by the infinite as a power existing outside it; on the contrary, its infinity consists in sublating its own self.

(Hegel 1969: 145–146 [emphasis in original])

The subject panentheistic credentials of Hegel's logic are to be found precisely in the interpenetration of the finite and infinite. Finitude's dependence for its self-determination on going beyond itself to the infinite means that it must be *self-transcendent* in order to *be* at all. Finite being *is* the act of transcending itself as finite being and so 'it therefore contains its other and is, consequently, in its own self the other of itself'. Conversely, neither can infinity be external to the finite, because it is but finitude's self-transcendence. Matter, nature and especially human history do not contain freedom within themselves as mere finite things, nor do they achieve freedom by going beyond themselves in an oppositional sense, because in achieving this goal, they are merely fulfilling their own being – becoming infinitely *real*. In short, the infinite and the finite achieve the status of reality via their intra-relationality: each is realised by the fact that it is present within the other – a process that Hegel refers to as "identity-in-difference". In this way, TI is the dissolution of the philosophical dualism that has presented them as oppositional categories since the time of Augustine and developed in a secular direction under the terms of PDM.

As Wallace has eloquently demonstrated, the completion of the transition from Substance to Subject can be seen in the role of the famous "negation of the negation", which energises finite self-transcendence (Wallace 2005: 89–90). As we have just seen, selfhood cannot be conceptualised as some autonomous entity precisely because in its self-determinedness, it is reliant on the other-determination of non-selfhood. The centrality of the negation of the negation to this process is revealed, as we saw, in Hegel's line from the *SL* that '[t]he negative of the negative is, as *something*, only the beginning of the subject [*Subjekt*] – being-within-itself, only as yet quite indeterminate' (Hegel 1969: 115 [emphasis in original]). So if the negation of the negation is the condition of something's self-reliance, then we conclude that selfhood – subjectivity – is an intrinsic part of Substance. And so contra Schelling, Substance can only *be* if it *already* contains Subject within itself. The logic of the negation of the negation also revealed finitude's failure as a resolution of the problem of being's self-relatedness, because, as we saw, limitation is but a reconstruction of other-determinedness. This propelled finite "Substance" onwards to a resolution in the self-transcendence that is TI. This is vital for both Hegel's panentheism and his political thought – the two topics that I wish to consider in the remainder of this chapter.

First, let us look at how an appreciation of the Hegelian conception of the self, from the perspective of TI, impacts on his view of God. As is so often the case with Hegel, he takes the Kantian conception of self-determination as his point of departure. To put it somewhat crudely, since Kantian infinity implies externality and oppositionality between it and the finite, the whole idea of self-determination collapses in the re-emergence of limitation and boundary that goes to the heart of spurious infinity. Selfhood as self-determination relies on its interpenetration with non-selfhood and other-determination – on identity-in-difference, i.e. the interpenetration of the finite and the infinite. So when Kant speaks of the "ought" that is contained in the moral duty of the CI, Hegel

responds that it is already contained in the strivings of finitude (e.g. in the inclinations) as intrinsic to its very being, rather than something which is distinct from it. This follows from what we have just seen regarding Substance's presupposition of Subject within it: necessity/determination already contains self-determination/freedom. And so the "ought" of free thinking has ontological primacy over determinate/finite being of mere Substance. As Wallace says:

it isn't difficult to imagine that when this notion of going beyond finite limitations through freedom is fully developed, this going-beyond will turn out ... to involve thought, and that in that way, thought will be shown to be more fundamental than being, or it will be shown that ... 'only thinking has being'.

(Wallace 2005: 90)

But, it is worth reiterating that, contra spurious infinity, this does not mean that being, finitude, nature, substance, etc. do not have reality *at all*. It means that their reality is dependent on their self-transcendence.

Unfortunately, there has been a tendency among some prominent Hegel scholars to either overlook the role of transcendence in finitude or not understand it very well. Terry Pinkard (2002), for example, seems to opt for a purely immanentist reading of Hegelian logic when he interprets infinity as referring merely to "the world-process" – i.e. the process of things coming-to-be and passing away taken as a self-subsistent whole. If it is self-subsistent, then it cannot be compared to any externality such as a transcendent reality. Infinity therefore refers to this internal, immanent world-process, rather than anything transcendent that would provide its "ground" (Pinkard 2002: 253). Pinkard seems to simply presuppose a dualistic definition of transcendence and because he cannot find evidence of it in Hegel's logic concludes that it is sufficient proof that the latter rejects any supernatural conception of infinity (Pinkard 2002: 253). But as we have already seen, just because Hegel denies the existence of an external infinite (which we know he dismisses as operating with a spurious conception of infinity) does not mean that he rejects transcendence altogether in favour of an immanentist ("grounded") theory of infinity; in fact, quite the reverse, because without it the finite world – the domain of the "world-process" – cannot even exist, as we have just seen. Pinkard fails to see how, with Hegel, the finite world is not self-sufficient and needs to transcend itself and consequently seems to present Hegel in pantheistic or even atheistic terms. He is not by any means the only one. For example, Joseph McCarney's study of Hegel's philosophy of history considers only two competing readings – the "transcendent" and "immanent" ones of theism and pantheism/atheism. We have already seen how the former reading is favoured in some Hegel scholarship by Stephen Houlgate (1991). McCarney opts for the latter reading, because he thinks the role of immanence is so great in Hegelian philosophy that the Christian Incarnation is radically inverted. McCarney thinks Hegel opts for a fairly pantheistic position in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (LPH) and argues that the latter thinks that

God's existence is immanent within, indeed is constituted by the domain of nature and human society, *and has no reality apart from them*. Such a view tends naturally towards pantheism; that is, the doctrine that God is identical with the universe, conceived not as a mere aggregate of particulars but as an impersonal, unified whole.

(McCarney 2000: 40 [emphasis added])

And so the Incarnation functions as a kind of metaphor of the immanentist unity of the finite and the infinite, rather than as evidence of the uniqueness of Christ as the second Person of the Trinity (McCarney 2000: 46–47). As McCarney puts it: '[i]nstead of being a doctrine of God taking on human form, it becomes the revelation of humanity as the highest expression of the divine, thus turning the central drama of Christian theism against its origins' (McCarney 2000: 48). But our definition of Hegelian finitude as self-transcendence renders an immanentist interpretation problematic, because it involves the explicit rejection of the idea that the immanent world can be self-sufficient. To reject, as Hegel does, theistic definitions of God as merely transcendent does not mean that he rejects transcendence and just opts for an immanentist take on infinity. There is a third option between merely endorsing traditional theism and completely rejecting it. Contra materialist naturalism, Hegel insists that it is not credible to simply presuppose matter as "given". We have seen that its being (freedom) depends on its self-transcendence. Nor is it credible, contra theism, to simply posit infinity as merely transcendent as though it makes logical sense (given that we define being as freedom) to posit two unrelated domains of reality hamstrung by a spurious – because oppositional – conception of the infinite. There is a third option that is much more in keeping with Hegel's logical system – panentheism. Rather than seeing God and the world in terms of dualistic opposition, the world is the attempt to seek a higher infinite reality for itself. God defined as finite self-transcendence is a God who, in panentheistic logic, *requires creation in order to exist*. This is the only way in which God can be said to be transcendent at all.

That Hegel, in fact, formulates the concept of finite self-transcendence and completes the transition in post-Spinozan philosophy to subjectivist metaphysics is ample evidence of his *subject* panentheism. To define infinity as finitude's self-transcendence is the expression in Hegelian logic of the panentheistic principle that "all is in God" and to insist that the dynamic of the process of intra-relationship (TI) lies with the negation of the negation (which posits selfhood as intrinsic to materiality's ontological credentials) constitutes Hegel's departure from the Schellingian idea of a primordial divine Subject. While for Schelling God is in His essence consequently distinct from the polarities and differences of the world, for Hegel His Absolute Identity with the world made His essence an intrinsic part of it. As we have seen above, subject panentheism renders God fully rational in a way that He is not under the terms of Schelling's philosophy. The rational dialectic is not just of this world, but part of the divine transcendent reality itself (Cooper 2007: 109–110). But this Absolute Identity where creation is required in order for God to Be does not mean that He is exhausted by finitude, as

we have seen when I introduced panentheism above. To say that He is so is to fail to grasp our key panentheistic concept, because to understand infinity as the struggle of creation to go *beyond itself* implies that there is more to the former than what is contained within the latter. Remember that this retention of the element of the transcendent was how panentheism is distinguished from pantheism.

### Dialectical subject panentheism and PMR

In a moment I will argue that this subject panentheistic concept of finite self-transcendence is key to grasping the emancipative content of Hegel's political thought in *PR*. But now I wish to make a brief comment on the points of convergence I see between this logical system and Bhaskar's PMR that we have been exploring in earlier chapters.

As we saw in the first chapter, PMR posits an intra-acting totality of matter with a deeper (5A) spiritual substratum that is the former's condition of possibility. All aspects of our being – including thoughts, actions and social agency – are underpinned by and connected to our ground-state, which the judgemental rationality of transcendent thinking puts us into contact with. As we saw, this vindication of transcendence and spirituality is the fundamental task of PMR enabling us to delineate demi- and metaReality. The Hegelian concept of the finite roughly corresponds to demi-reality and the infinite to metaReality. I am proposing that the Hegelian panentheistic concept of being as freedom captures the essence of the Bhaskarian concept of the ground-state. The deeper reality that is uncovered beneath the demi-real of finite existence is that of freedom (totalised being, non-alienatory modes of existence, etc.). The demi-real exists as such, to the extent to which it frustrates and is parasitic upon the realisation of its own essential nature to transcend itself.

It is important to point out, however, that this confluence of Hegel and Bhaskar hinges on the correction of the latter's misinterpretation of the former that was made in *DPF* and reaffirmed in the spiritual turn. Demi-reality can be incorporated into a Hegelian framework only if it is interpreted as *finite* self-transcendence and metaReality exists as *finite* self-*transcendence*. This, in turn, presupposes, as we have seen, that we avoid the common misconception in much Hegel scholarship that Absolute Spirit's intra-relationality with matter is one of fundamental identity. Unfortunately, it is precisely this error that is repeated in *DPF* where Bhaskar misconstrues the thought-matter, subject-object identity at the heart of Hegelian teleologism (Bhaskar 1993: 91). Since he understands the world of (phenomenal) experiences as the working out of the Idea, finite reality is merely 'the conformity of an object to its notion' (Bhaskar 1993: 26) resulting in a 'constellationally closed, completed ... achieved identity theory' (Bhaskar 1993: 24). That Bhaskar buys into the immanentist reading of Hegel is aptly revealed in the following statement:

...in the Hegelian *Geistodyssey* of infinite, petrified (natural) and finite mind, the principle of idealism, the speculative understanding of reality as

(absolute) spirit, is unfolded in the shape of an immanent teleology which shows ... how the world exists (and, at least in the human realm, develops) as a rational totality *precisely* so that (infinite) spirit can come to philosophical self-consciousness in the Hegelian system demonstrating this. Absolute idealism is the articulation and recognition of the identity of being in thought for thought.

(Bhaskar 1993: 18–19 [emphasis in original])

The ‘rational totality’ so conceived renders Hegel vulnerable to basic CR errors of denying intransitivity and natural necessity where there prevails the ‘conformity of an object to its notion’ (Bhaskar 1993: 26). Once we accept this reading, we are unlikely to have much sympathy for the Hegelian system once we make the move to PMR. This denial of the transcendent in the reduction of the Hegelian infinite to a mere world-process is a key means of distinction between Hegel’s system and the PMR category of the ground-state, which provides its transcendent component (5A). Important CR errors of the denial of intransitivity are symptoms of the former. Bhaskar argues that Hegel is guilty of what he calls the *ontic fallacy* (Bhaskar 1993: 181), which is the error of reducing our knowledge of the object of cognition to the object itself (i.e. the reverse error of the epistemic fallacy). Bhaskar calls this ‘the compulsive determination of knowledge by being ... in the guise of reified facts or hypostatized ideas’ (Bhaskar 1993: 4) or ‘the presupposition of the determination of knowledge by being’ (Bhaskar 1993: 90). An immanentist reading of Hegel would strongly suggest that he is guilty of this error and, sure enough, Bhaskar accuses him of “eternalising” actuality – a crime he labels *spiritual constellational monism* (Bhaskar 1994: 122). As he puts it in *PE*:

Hegel presents ... the process of thinking generally, transformed into an independent subject (the Idea) as the demiurge of the empirical world ... [Hegel’s] thought actually consists in *uncritically received empirical data* ... which is in this way reified and eternalised.

(Bhaskar 1994: 126 [emphasis added])

By ‘uncritically received empirical data’, Bhaskar means equating given empirical facts with real structures.

I argue, however, that the panentheistic Hegel is guilty of no such identification. Bhaskar is attributing to Hegel a pantheistic definition of “finite reality” (as self-sufficient) divested of the key element of transcendence. Now, according to panentheism, if the empirical world has its own transcendence written into its very being, which, in turn, presupposes that the transcendent realm to which it aspires contains but is not exhausted by it, then we might think that if we interpret Absolute Spirit in terms of subject panentheism, this accusation does not apply. We cannot accuse Hegel of a simple subject-object identity in the fashion that Bhaskar does. This accusation is more popularly known in CR circles as the error of *ontological monovalence* (Hegel’s inability to sustain intransitivity and

natural necessity). I will say more about this accusation in a moment when I comment on how finite self-transcendence is predicated on a conception of infinity that embraces “degrees of reality”, which addresses some of these concerns. It seems that if the Hegelian system was indeed immanentist, then Bhaskar’s criticism would hold, but since Hegel denies that the empirical can be self-sufficient and instead must presuppose a deeper (or higher, infinite) dimension as the condition of its existence, it does not. We have seen how the concept of finite self-transcendence demonstrates that it is wrong to draw a distinction between finite self-*transcendence* and metaReality and that transcendence is not only present in Hegelian logic, it is its means of avoiding spurious definitions of Absolute Spirit that, sadly, Bhaskar’s interpretation in the DCR stage of his thinking assumes. And it seems that Bhaskar still held to this view of the Hegelian system by the time of the spiritual turn (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010: 160). It may explain why he does not make use of it in the formation of PMR. We will see in the next chapter, however, that Ludwig Feuerbach does a better job of locating anthropomorphic subject–object identity errors in objective idealism.

### **Dialectical subject panentheism and Hegelian political thought**

It is now time for us to explore the implications for Hegel’s social and political theory of his subject panentheism. In short, when he speaks in the *LPH* of the Absolute positing Itself in its other, he is presupposing his definition of infinity – *as* finitude’s self-*transcendence* – developed in the *SL*. Indeed, this point of departure from traditional configurations of transcendence characteristic of Anselmian theism – from God’s transcendence conceptualised oppositionally with creation to God’s transcendence conceptualised, via the concept of identity-in-difference, as ontologically intra-dependent with creation – has massive implications for Hegelian philosophy of history and politics. God as finite self-transcendence is translated into the language of historical and political philosophers by saying that He comes to Be to the extent to which human society achieves varying degrees of freedom. As people strive in their experiences to go beyond the immediacy of those experiences in order to attain a higher goal (an “ought”), they are seeking their own reality, their own selfhood. This is the quest for a rational authority. Historically, we call such an authority God, but it is not a conception of God that presupposes an external transcendent. Rather, in accordance with Hegelian logic, this is God defined as the self-transcendence of the world.

Given that these definitions of how both historico-politics and God as intra-related are so compelling, it is strange that some political theorists think that it is possible to explore Hegel’s political ideas without grounding them in terms of his concept of God. As I said at the start of this chapter, *LPH* and *PR* are unmistakably works of historical and political *theology*, and it is an error to think of them in any other way. And the fact that they are pervaded by rationality is why Hegel, in my view, is one of the most important post-secularists in

the post-Enlightenment period. Unfortunately, such an attempt to shorn Hegel of his theo-ontology characterises the work of no less a figure than Charles Taylor. He begins by erroneously attributing to Hegel an external definition of the transcendent-immanent relation. The following passage in his *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979) is instructive in revealing Taylor's views on the nature of the dependency of infinite Spirit (i.e. God) on finite spirit (i.e. humanity):

Consciousness is only possible when the subject is set over against an object. But to be set over against an object is to be limited by something other, and hence to be finite. It follows that if cosmic spirit is to attain full awareness, it can only be through vehicles which are finite spirits. Hence finite, limited spirits are necessary. The notion of a cosmic spirit which would be aware of itself directly, without the opposition to an object which is the predicament of finite spirits, is incoherent. . . . Thus, *Geist* must have a vehicle in finite spirits.

(Taylor 1979: 26)<sup>9</sup>

Notice the oppositional thrust of Taylor's understandings of Hegelian "finite" and "infinite", which demonstrates that he is using precisely the conceptions that Hegel rejects – i.e. ones that smack of spurious infinity. The metaphor "vehicle" suggests the appropriation of external finite spirits by infinite Spirit as the condition of possibility of its self-awareness. But it is precisely this which the concept of finite self-transcendence disallows. The activity of finite spirit is, as we have seen, the quest for self-hood as its (or rather our) condition of possibility of being. Its activity should therefore be appreciated less in terms of its appropriation by some essentially external divine authority and more as *its own* struggle to achieve reality *for itself* – transcendence grasped as *self*-transcendence, rather than external transcendence. It is as though Taylor continues to place what Hegel attributes ontological primacy to – freedom – in a domain external to the world of human history and society. I cannot conceive how else we are to grasp Taylor's "vehicle" metaphor – that human beings are merely necessary instruments in what is an essentially divine quest for freedom. Although Taylor recognises that the divine's dependency on the finite takes Hegelian theology beyond Anselmian theism, it falls short of Hegel's own purposes of classifying God as finite self-transcendence and so retains at least echoes of theistic oppositionality.

Having misrepresented Hegel on this issue, Taylor then proceeds to reject Hegelian ontology completely and focuses instead on what social, political, historical and cultural insights Hegel offers that can be salvaged from this onto-theological wreckage. In *Hegel* (1975), he tells us that 'no one actually believes his central ontological thesis, that the universe is posited by a Spirit whose essence is rational necessity' (Taylor 1975: 538). As we have seen, Hegel tried to synthesise Enlightenment rationalism with Romanticist non-dualistic expressivism. Indeed, his key onto-theological category – finite self-transcendence – should be seen in this light. For Taylor, the triumph of the utilitarian grasp of

rationalism (what we have seen as the ascendancy of CM and PDM definitions of the isolated self) has not imperilled Hegelian anthropologism – what he calls the anthropologisation of *Geist* (Taylor 1975: 546). But its achievements in both modern civil society and natural science have effectively discredited the idea that the best way we can understand matter is as an embodiment of infinite Spirit. Regarding the former, Taylor observes that in the years since Hegel's death, there has been precious little evidence of citizens identifying themselves in the structures of the state (which, as we will see, is rather important in Hegelian politics). Regarding the latter, the ever increasing complexity and diversity of the sciences has rendered the attempt to identify an underlying, meaningful, rational structure to them problematic, to say the least (Taylor 1975: 543). Nature cannot now be seen as 'the manifestation of spiritual powers or a divine principle' (Taylor 1975: 545). But as we have seen, Taylor is no apologist for CM/PDM. Hegel's philosophy makes a key contribution to the expressivist protest against the truncation of the self we have seen characterise modernist thought. But the condition of the contribution is that we dispense with the onto-logos of the system and instead immerse Hegel in the anthropologised interpretation of *Geist*. It is the fruits of this (mis)appropriation of Hegel that we have seen in the last chapter in our discussion of Taylor's post-secular turn in his recent writings.

The problem with Hegel's logic, as Taylor sees it, is that it has been built on a Spinozan pantheistic synthesis (Taylor 1975: 545) that we have just seen is an immanentist distortion of Hegelian logic. If Taylor had identified the subject panentheism at work within the system, perhaps he would not have felt the need to strip Hegel of his onto-logics in a reduction of his political thought to an exercise in mere anthropologist expressivism.

Similarly, critical sentiments can be seen in Bhaskar's reading of Hegel's social theory. In keeping with his pantheistic interpretation, Bhaskar seems to accuse the latter of dissolving causality into teleology in his social theorising. The implications for transformative social agency (4D) are apparently severe:

At 4D he [Hegel] is unable to sustain essential transformability ... transformative ... totalising ... transitional praxis.... The most relevant signposts here are ... the absence of intransitivity and the autonomy of nature, which Hegel sees under the aspect of petrified mind ... the absence of natural necessity (and transfactual efficacy) and of activity irreducible to mind ... and the absence of the category of absence and of the irreducible geo-historicity of social forms.

(Bhaskar 1993: 340)

It seems that Hegelian political thought, by virtue of the collapse of causality into teleology, is unable to account for intentional causal praxis of social agents who act to transform conditions of exploitation. Teleologism appears here as the enemy of absentive causal change, since it involves rationally transfiguring existing social structures; Hegel's failure to acknowledge 'the irreducible

geo-historicity of social forms'. Hegelianism is therefore incompatible with TMSA and consequently with de-alienating social structures at 3L. It functions as a justification of the status quo as the only possible system (what Bhaskar calls *TINA compromise formations – There Is No Alternative*). In *DPF*, he argues that 'the Hegelian dialectic may be regarded as a progressive compounding of Tina compromise upon Tina compromise ... [a] constellationally conciliatory compromise with the prevailing order of things, rationally transfigured under the configuration of the absolute idea' (Bhaskar 1993: 118–119). Immanentist teleologism, in short, has the TINA compromise effect of 'closing off a potentially, necessarily and open totality and so shutting out the possibility of further essential progress' (Bhaskar 1993: 119).

At the risk of labouring the point, once again we can see how Bhaskar is operating with a contentious understanding of the key Hegelian category of finitude. As we have just seen above, Bhaskar thinks that Hegel merely equates given empirical facts with real structures, that actuality is just factual existence. When reading the above passage, I was mindful of a common misreading of Hegel's famous phrase in the introduction to *PR* regarding the rationality of the actually existing social conditions that I think Bhaskar is repeating: 'what is rational is real; and what is real is rational' (Hegel 2001: 18). Remember how finite self-transcendence uncovers what we might call *degrees of reality*. "Reality" as it is meant in the *PR* presupposes its meaning in the *EL* and *SL*. That is, it is not just the rational justification of given contingent social conditions, because TI disallows the practice of attributing rationality as such to mere empirical existence (because mere empirical existence is not self-determining). Rather, what is rational is that which exhibits self-determination. Anything that falls short of this is "less real" than something which exhibits it fully. It is therefore a little harsh to insist, as Bhaskar seems to, that this famous Hegelian dictum founders on its presupposition of merely "eternalising actuality". Rather, 'what is rational is real' should be taken to mean that reality is that which exhibits freedom as it is grasped under the terms of TI – i.e. that which transcends mere empirical finite existence. And conversely, 'what is real is rational' should be taken to mean that when something finite – in this case, the social structure – exhibits freedom as transcendent self-determination (i.e. it becomes real), then it is deemed to be rational. To be fair to Hegel, he provides a clarifying comment immediately after the above dictum that: 'nothing is real except the idea ... The rational is synonymous with the idea' (Hegel 2001: 18). And later in the text, when speaking of the state, he strongly implies the view of lesser and greater forms of reality when he says that 'the state as a *completed reality* is the ethical whole and the *actualisation of freedom*' (Hegel 2001: 197, §258 [emphasis added]). Only if we have an immanentist grasp of the "Idea" as it is presented in the *EL* and *SL* can we possibly accuse Hegel of actualism.<sup>10</sup>

It follows that human agents, as finite spirits, are *ontologically required* to engage in struggles to, in the language of DCR, "absent" detotalising social structures. Again, their propensity towards the transcendence of their condition in their quest for self-determination ensures that no such 'rational transfiguration' of

social structures that frustrate this occurs. We may call social structures that deny self-determination to individual human beings many things, but we, if we are Hegelian, may not call them real (or rather “fully real”), because they are not rational under the terms of Hegelian logic.<sup>11</sup> In the language of PMR, social structures that frustrate the self-determining activity of its social agents are disconnected from their ground-state and consequently are only *demi-real*. It is only when they are connected with deeper (or higher, infinite) reality that they achieve the status of full reality or metaReality.

Thankfully, not everyone fails to grasp the core definition of finitude as self-transcendence. As a consequence, although one might still find conceptual or historical-political reasons to reject his onto-logos (as I will do in the next chapter), one is at least more likely to appreciate its central importance for the entirety of the Hegelian system, including his philosophy of history and politics. As Wallace argues, for example: ‘[Hegel’s] philosophical theology, and his ethical and social theories … derive their special character very much from this central conceptual move [the concept of finite self-transcendence]’ (Wallace 2005: 51). I now discuss how any account of Hegel’s political thought that omits TI (and by extension, subject panentheism) is impoverished.

### **Panentheism and the individual-state relationship in Hegel’s political philosophy**

In what way does Hegel’s panentheistic vision of a rationalistically determined social telos permit emancipative social praxis to occur? The answer is revealed in his view of individual freedom and its relation to the social whole. I argue below that this relationship must be viewed through the prism of our key concept of finite self-transcendence in the sense that both must be self-determining – and hence rational in Hegel’s definition of the term – in order to be “real”.

This issue can usefully be explored by utilising Fredrick Neuhouser’s term *methodological atomism* and determining the extent to which we can see its rationale demonstrated in Hegel’s political thought. This is the view that

the principles that define the collective good of a social group can be exhaustively constructed from a starting point that takes into account only the interests that members of the group have as *individuals* – that is, when viewed atomistically, in abstraction from their membership of the particular social institution under consideration.

(Neuhouser 2000: 176 [emphasis in original])

Allen Wood has expressed this idea somewhat more succinctly as the extent to which ‘collective goods have value because they have value *for individuals*’ (Wood 1990: 259 [emphasis in original]). Given the panentheistic interpretation of Hegelian logic, I have advanced that it should not surprise the reader that the political community is rational (i.e. real), to the extent to which it provides the conditions for the realisation of the interests of its individuals. The holistic good

that the rational social order realises is conditional on how much it promotes the interests of its individual members. But conversely (and this is how Hegelianism is qualitatively distinct from social contract theory), the satisfaction of the interests of individuals is also conditional on the extent to which the social order in which they live is itself fully rational (i.e. self-determining). The social order, in short, is rational only when it realises a good that is higher than (i.e. transcendent of) but not distinct from the interests of its finite members. Both the individual and the social order must be self-sustaining in accordance with the rational structure of the Concept. Finite self-transcendence will be, as always, of central importance in getting our heads around this complex intra-relationship.

Let us look, then, at how the Hegelian individual-state relationship exhibits the characteristics of finite self-transcendence in more detail. Firstly, individual citizens, as finite entities, obviously have an interest in securing their own freedom. In his concept of civil society in the *PR*, Hegel interprets this as the desire, among other things, by the people for private enterprise. Accordingly, the best way for the state to accommodate itself to this fact of human nature is to provide a market-based economy of production and exchange. The interdependency of citizen and state consists in the fact that:

...in this society every one is an end to himself; all others are for him nothing. And yet without coming into relation with others he cannot realise his ends.... The self-seeking end is conditioned in its realization by the universal. Hence is formed a system of mutual dependence, a system, which interweaves the subsistence, happiness, and rights of the individual with the subsistence, happiness and rights of all.

(Hegel 2001: 154–155, §182–183)

This, of course, does not mean that Hegel is endorsing the rationale of the state to be found in social contract liberalism. He is not saying that the rationality of the social order is exhausted by its ability to satisfy the interests of individuals as such, either abstract (i.e. asocial individualism) or, for that matter, what we might call *parochial* (i.e. identity forming localised cultural values).<sup>12</sup> This would mean that there is no such thing as non-instrumental desire for social participation on the part of individuals. Clearly, Hegel wants us to value social participation *for its own sake* – i.e. as an end in itself. Neuhouser argues that social contract theory involves the former view – what he calls individualism *in substance* – whereas methodological atomism as such does not necessarily have to involve such a commitment (Neuhouser 2000: 181). It is this subtle but crucial distinction that seems to suggest that the latter is not necessarily inimical to Hegelian interests, while the former obviously is. Neuhouser wonders whether it might be possible to imagine a state of affairs where there was a fundamental symbiosis between the interests of individuals as such and non-instrumental social participation (Neuhouser 2000: 182). That is, might there be a sense in which my interests as an individual might only be achievable non-instrumentally – i.e. if I conceive of myself as more than a mere isolated ego? If so, then

methodological atomism might be compatible with Hegel's anti-social contract view of the rationality of the social order (i.e. that it must transcend the realisation of mere individualistic instrumentality) after all. It will come as no surprise, given my interpretation of Hegel in this chapter, that I believe that there is such a symbiosis to be found in his political thought and that it is centred on the issue of *freedom* for both the individual and the social order as a whole.

In order to see how individual freedom is dependent on non-instrumental social participation, we need to invoke Hegelian logic's grasp of the nature of finitude at the very heart of the definition of the private individual. As such, individuals value their freedom from: (1) material dependence on others and nature; and (2) being subject to the will of other individuals. But like any other finite substance, individual human beings cannot secure this freedom if they adopt a purely instrumental approach to its realisation, such as we see characterise liberal social contract articulations of their relationship to the social whole. That is, under the terms of the Hegelian logic, individuals cannot secure their interests as individuals as such if they treat the social order (and in particular the political state) as a mere means to being free. If they do so, then they are not overcoming the barrier to their self-determination as dictated by the logic – namely, the externality of their relationship to each other and the state. As finite things, individuals must overcome their status as the negation of their other by *containing it within themselves*. In the language of political theory, this means that they must see their own will in the state. And so they can only be free (and so secure their interests as individuals as such) if they treat the social whole non-instrumentally, which requires them to will the common good – i.e. sets of laws designed to advance the interests of all citizens as the condition for the advancement of the interests of each individual. Thus, in order to secure their interests as individuals (i.e. to be free as individuals), citizens must embrace a higher conception of freedom than their mere parochial interests.<sup>13</sup> They must embrace a conception of individual freedom that is transcendent of these finite interests as the condition of the fulfilment of those interests – i.e. they must will the *infinite* freedom of the state.

The immediate question we could ask in response to this concerns whether the pressure placed on how individuals view their relationship to the social whole really is the manifestation of finite self-*transcendence*. Is it not possible for an individual to see the instrumental utility in willing the common good (i.e. because he/she realises that it is the best way to secure his/her own selfish interests)? If so, then there is nothing genuinely transcendent here – he/she wills the common good without fundamentally restructuring his/her identity as a self-serving ego. Individuals must will the common good, but it remains possible that they could do so instrumentally. The problem is that if they do, then they remain unfree under the terms of the Concept, because they are viewing the common good as, in an important sense, *external* to their own wills. It is only if they embrace the common good non-instrumentally that are they able to say that its laws are purely internal – i.e. their own. Remember that it is in the nature of finite things to be free and of sentient finite things like human beings to will their

own freedom. But for this to happen – and for them to be *real* – they must transcend the manifestations of their finitude (selfish parochial interests) and embrace something more universal (i.e. duty). Hegel could not really be clearer on the linkage between freedom and the ontological status of the individual in the *PR*:

Since the phases of the ethical system are the conception of freedom, they are the substance or universal essence of individuals ... the individual finds in duty liberation. He is freed from subjection to mere natural impulse; he is freed from the dependence which he as subjective and particular felt towards moral permission and command; he is freed also from that indefinite subjectivity, which does not issue in the objective realisation implied in action, *but remains wrapped up in its own unreality*.... In duty we reach the *real essence*, and gain positive freedom.

(Hegel 2001: 132, 134, §145, §147 [emphasis added])

As Neuhouser argues, what we have here is a concept of individual freedom that is then used to formulate strict criteria for what is deemed rational in terms of institutional political forms (Neuhouser 2000: 203). My argument is that, not only is such a concept present, it is the application of panentheistically constructed logic to the individual–society–state relationship in the *PR*. The rational state is defined as the realisation of the self-determination of the individual citizen where self-determination is defined as the transcendence by the individual of narrow finite interests. The rational state, in other words, is the individual's *self-transcendence*. Just as the freedom of the individual depends on the dissolution of externality – the negation of the negation – so we can detect precisely the same criterion of rationality at work in the concept of the state. This is, of course, the crucial means of distinguishing Hegel from other communitarian thinkers such as Rousseau. The General Will differs from the Hegelian rational state in its methodological atomist presuppositions. The freedom of the social whole (*objective freedom*) is realised for Rousseau by the General Will securing individual self-determination (*subjective freedom*). For Hegel, on the other hand, the latter is but an aspect of the realisation of objective freedom, which accordingly is defined as the self-determination of the social whole itself (Neuhouser 2000: 131). That is, for Rousseau, the General Will exists ultimately to serve a conception of the good *external* to it – i.e. the subjective freedom of the individual. It seems to me that the concept of finite self-transcendence is not applicable to the latter's definition of objective freedom, because the individual does not exist so as to secure the self-determination of the social whole. Rather, the social whole exists to secure individual self-determination or as Hegel puts it: 'he [Rousseau] conceives of the will only in the limited form of the individual will ... and regards the universal will not as the absolutely reasonable will, but only as the common will, proceeding out of the individual will' (Hegel 2001: 196, §258). It is precisely because the General Will originates in the one-sidedness of the individual will that Rousseau conceives of the social whole in

contractarian terms, ‘based upon caprice, opinion, and optional, explicit consent’ (Hegel 2001: 195, §258). The externality consists of this asymmetrical relationship. According to Hegelian criteria, the General Will has no reality, because it is bounded by its relation of dependency on the finite wills that make it up. Conceived purely in oppositional terms, it cannot overcome its “other-relatedness” and so cannot achieve full being. Remember that the concept of finite self-transcendence states that in order for something to be, it must overcome its status as the negation of its other by containing its other within itself. In the case of the individual, self-determination is secured by identifying him/herself with the social whole. For Hegel, individual citizens have more than just private/parochial interests, but are truly universal in their outlook. In this sense, Hegel goes along with Rousseauian objective freedom. But it is insufficient because it cannot sustain a coherent account of the social whole. Hegel argues that objective freedom must also consist in the self-determination of the social whole and this consists in it being individual wills’ self-transcendence. The difficulties Hegel has with the General Will can therefore be accounted for with the presence of TI in general and the concept of finite self-transcendence in particular in his political theory and their absence in Rousseau’s. If we distinguish between the two thinkers’ understandings of what it means to be “objectively free”, then we might say that whereas Rousseau embraces a lower conception, the operation of the Absolute Idea in Hegel’s political theorising means that he embraces both this lower and a transcendent (higher) definition.

Hegel’s critique of social contract thinking – of which the General Will is a communitarian version – is made clear in the *PR* when he denies that the state’s ‘decisive features [are] to be regarded as the security and protection of property and personal freedom’ (Hegel 2001: 195, §258). Rather, the state ‘is the objective spirit, *and he* [the individual] *has his truth, real existence, and ethical status only in being a member of it*’ (Hegel 2001: 195, §258 [emphasis added]). The truth of the individual is not something which can be abstractly conceptualised in some pre-social (in the fashion of Hobbes and Kant) or pre-political (Locke) form, but *is* (has being) only concretely in its social and political identity. And conversely, the state itself secures freedom objectively when it is this transcendence of private or parochial individual interests. It is only in terms of finite self-transcendence (when identity-in-difference and hence self-determination, which is the dissolution of external relationality, are secured) that the rationality of the individual and state is to be located. Society, when it functions to actualise this intra-relationality, comes to embody rationality (i.e. the logical Concept) or as Hegel tells us:

it is the unity of objective with subjective freedom, of the general substantive will with the individual consciousness.... We must bear in mind the fundamental conception that the objective will is in itself rational in its very conception ... *The state as a completed reality is the ethical whole and the actualisation of freedom.*

(Hegel 2001: 195, 196, 197, §258 [emphasis added])

But what makes it rational – as the embodiment and realisation of Absolute Spirit – is precisely its identity-in-difference that secures its self-determination – namely, its ability to secure the reality of its individual members. We can thereby dispense with one of the most common misrepresentations of Hegelian political thought that equates the telos at the heart of objective freedom with the obliteration of individualism in the celebration of some ghastly totalitarian dystopian society. The state is rational *only* to the extent to which ‘it is the unity of objective and subjective freedom’. Its interests cannot therefore be defined, as it is for Rousseau’s social contract, externally to those of the individual, otherwise we have a state–individual relation that has nothing whatsoever to do with the logical dictates of finite self-transcendence. Rather, the concern for individual self-determination is *internal* to the telos of the state itself.

The social whole is rational, therefore, when it follows the three stages of finite self-transcendence (Concept) – the family (immediate unity of the individual with other family members as his/her final end), civil society (difference where the individual engages instrumentally in wider social relationships) and the state (unity-in-difference where immediacy and difference are integrated into the social whole). This rationality consists not in the social whole’s ability to deliver the specific ends of each component (as it would in social contract thinking and even under the terms of the Rousseauian General Will), because this would presuppose relations of externality between them that would leave them in relations of mutual dependence. Rather, its rationality consists in the fact that it permits each to exist as a unity-in-difference and thereby be truly self-determining.

What all of this discussion concerning the reality of the individual and the social whole in terms of their intra-related self-determination (the individual as *finite* self-transcendence; the state as the individual’s *transcendence* of him/herself) really involves is the identification of infinite qualities in each of these key domains of the social world. For the individual, it is the desire to transcend mere finite interests. For the state, it is its status as the transcendence of finite aspects of individuality. There are clear parallels here with the role of the panentheistic divine that we have seen at work in the Logic. The individual – like finite reality – is “godlike” in the sense of containing the infinite within him/herself as a condition of his/her individuality. Indeed, as “finite spirit”, the individual is the supreme mechanism of the realisation of infinity in the material world. The state, for its part, is divine to the extent to which it actualises the individual’s self-transcendence. It is in this sense, I think, that we are to understand the following statement from the *PR* where Hegel declares that

[t]he state as a *completed reality* is the ethical whole and the *actualisation of freedom*. It is the absolute power of reason that freedom should be actualised.... The state is the march of God in the world; its ground or cause is the power of reason realizing itself as will.

(Hegel 2001: 197, §258 [emphasis added])

As a unity-in-difference, the state is an absolute end in itself as a self-determining rational entity. This is in contrast to Rousseau, who, as we have seen, conceptualises the state in methodological atomistic terms and so views ‘the universal will not as the absolutely reasonable will, but only as the common will, proceeding out of the individual will ... which destroy[s] the absolutely divine, and its absolute authority and majesty’ (Hegel 2001: 196, §258). This is to reiterate the point above about how Hegel’s concept of the social whole is, unlike Rousseau, irreducible to the private interests of individuals as such, precisely because it exhibits divine qualities of self-sufficiency. Just as the state achieves TI in this way, so does the individual by transcending the barriers to a fulfilled sense of individuality. The “godlike” state equips individuals with the means for such transcendence by enabling them to at last achieve what is their ultimate desire for self-determination; going beyond their finitude to enjoy a more enduring existence in its membership that would be *inaccessible* to individuals who treated the common good merely instrumentally.<sup>14</sup> I may once again be risking labouring the point when I say that this function of the state is how we are to interpret Hegel’s otherwise worrying claim that the state should enjoy ‘absolute authority and majesty’ over its citizens. It is its status as a *transcendent* (remembering our specifically panentheistic definition of the word) divine entity that ensures it cannot simply ride roughshod over these fundamental yearnings of its citizens to be free.

### **Conclusion: the importance of Hegel’s meta-post-secularism**

It is therefore clear from all of this that the matter of Hegel’s position in relation to the issue of meta-post-secularism is of no small importance to the relevance that his political thought has to our modern, liberally minded society. How ironic it is, then, that some sympathetic commentators have argued precisely the contrary position. We have already seen how Charles Taylor thinks that Hegel only speaks to us if we reject his theo-ontology, and Bhaskar is of the view that it is precisely his thoughts on matters theological that provides the source for a politically conservative viewpoint. Neuhaus goes further than this by suggesting we need not even think of Hegel as an immanent post-secularist. He seems to think that it is possible for us to grasp the constraints his concept of rationality and self-determination places on both the individual and the state without taking into account his theology at all (Neuhaus 2000: 221). And we certainly do not need to acknowledge Hegel’s theo-ontology in order to see how both the state is only rational (and hence fully real) to the extent to which it exists as the means whereby the individual can secure self-determination and, conversely, how the latter’s “reality” is conditional upon becoming a member of the state. In other words, we do not need to see Hegel as a meta-post-secularist in order to understand how accusations of autocracy or political “actualism” (to use a CR term) are wide of the mark. For Neuhaus, this interpretation of Hegel is possible because he thinks that, contra what Hegel himself argues in the *PR*, non-instrumentality is compatible with methodological atomism. He identifies an

underlying Rousseauian principle in Hegel's insistence that an individual's freedom is only actualised when his/her identity is partly constituted by membership of the state.<sup>15</sup> This principle constitutes a secular logic to why citizens should undertake selfless duties in the service and defence of the political community, such as sacrificing themselves in war (Neuhouser 2000: 220). This effectively narrows the distance between Hegel and communitarian social contract theory. The only remaining light between these two positions is what Neuhouser takes to be the pantheistically inspired definition of the divine state in Hegelian political thought. But, by virtue of its Rousseauian credentials, the acknowledgement of the self-sufficient and self-reproducing state that is rationally organised to realise the practical emancipative goals of its citizens is not necessarily evidence of its divinity (Neuhouser 2000: 221). Pantheism may help to inspire Hegel to arrive at the rational state, but we do need to be versed in this particular theology in order to understand his intent.

Nevertheless, despite suggesting that we can dispense with matters theological and still fully understand Hegel's arguments in *PR*, Neuhouser is still prepared to indulge those of us who seem to think such matters are rather important. The key point concerns Hegel's alleged pantheism. Its core immanentism provides important protections for the individual against state autocracy (Neuhouser 2000: 222–223). Pantheism's identification of so-called "sparks of divinity" in both the individual and the state – i.e. their respective natures to be free – places a demanding democratic ideal on the shoulders of any state that wishes to enjoy the status of full rationality. For Neuhouser, then, it is in the absence of transcendence in Hegel's theo-ontology that we are to find his democratic credentials. As we have seen in our discussion of Bhaskar's interpretation of Hegel, however, the opposite is true. It is precisely the *presence* of transcendence – albeit panentheistically rather than theistically conceived – that protects Hegelian politics from becoming hamstrung by actualist errors that would render it vulnerable, in the language if DCR, to detotalising stasis of rationally transfiguring empirical existence. Neuhouser is quite correct to point out against Hegel's critics – of which Bhaskar is one – that the rationality of the state is conditional upon the realisation of the freedom of the individual. But he is dead wrong to credit pantheism with providing the theological source of this defence of democratic idealism. This is where I agree with Bhaskar's thoughts on the political implications of pantheism for emancipative activity by social agents: it involves errors of ontological monovalence and spiritual constellational monism, which frustrate genuinely absenteive revolutionary activity against oppressive (irrational) social structures. Thankfully, Hegel is no pantheist. Rather, his definition of rationality as self-determination is the product of a subject historical panentheism, which involves the concept of finite self-*transcendence* as its core ontological category. It is from this that key democratic safeguards are derived, for reasons we have explored at length already. It is this concept, for example, that requires us to think in terms of *degrees of reality* where empirically existing social structures and agents are assessed in terms of rationalistic criteria of freedom *transcendent* of those conditions of existence. We have also seen, for

example, how Hegel's theology is perhaps most notable in post-Enlightenment thought as the final dissolution of the Spinozan divine Substance. Contrast this with Neuhausser's comments that Hegel's protection of the rights of individuals lie in the fact that he 'invokes a version of Spinoza's conception of divine substance in order to explain the state's authority' (Neuhausser 2000: 221). But we know that were Hegel to have embraced such a conception, he would be hamstrung by a spurious definition of finitude and infinity that would be more likely to retard the emancipative content of his social theory. It is precisely when Hegel goes beyond Schellingian Substance panentheism and dialecticises the divine in Itself that his political thought is infused with its full revolutionary potential, because Divine freedom (and hence full Being) rests on the realisation of human freedom. Substance metaphysics, by virtue of its bounded conception of both the finite and the infinite, involves either a defence of the external transcendent (characteristic of theism) or self-sufficient materiality (characteristic of immanence). As we have seen, in opting for either position, we are making our choice between metaphysical systems that are vulnerable to detotalising social practices that have little in common with genuinely emancipative discourse.

Ultimately, whether one finds Hegelianism appealing or not should depend less on whether one finds the emancipative content of the *PR* convincing (I have argued that it is at least logically coherent) than on whether or not we endorse the ontological idealism that underpins the concept of finite self-transcendence. If we do, then the Hegelian system may be considerably appealing. But I now wish to proceed to examine key thinkers within the Hegelian tradition who have identified some important weaknesses in his underlying idealism. Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx have attempted to move Hegelian philosophy in the direction of atheism and materialism. In the following two chapters, I explore how these projects are important contributions to immanent utopia and immanent post-secularism. This sets the scene for an exploration of a more ambitious materialism of Ernst Bloch, who goes beyond immanence and applies some key Hegelian metaRealist principles in the formation of materialist meta-utopia and meta-post-secularism.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most notable recent example is Frederick Neuhausser's *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory* (2000). While Neuhausser does not deny that deeper theo-metaphysical categories are "foundational" to Hegelian social and political normative concepts, his intent is a more modest attempt to 'simply articulate as clearly as possible what those norms are' (Neuhausser 2000: 2). I am of the view, however, that to fully articulate Hegel's key normative categories, one must engage explicitly with his theo-metaphysics in general and panentheism in particular.
- <sup>2</sup> Kant, of course, is famous for his demolition of Anselm's and Descartes' ontological arguments.
- <sup>3</sup> Exploring Hegel's opposition to Kant on the relationship between the modern self and God also helps reveal a fault line between religiously minded exponents of CR (pre-DCR) and the Bhaskar of PMR. (As I have explained in the first chapter, the dialectical turn prefigures and does important groundwork in the shift from demi-reality to

metaReality.) I have in mind here the utilisation of key CR concepts – especially TR, judgemental rationality and epistemic relativism – in the defence of theism by Margaret Archer, Andrew Collier and Doug Porpora (ACP) in *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (2004). Their defence of the judgemental rationality of the religious condition involves appeals to intuitive religious experience, rather than the yielding of knowledge of the divine. To me, this indicates that their position has more in common with a broadly Kantian position, whereas Bhaskar's PMR immanentisation of God has much more in common with the Hegelian endeavour to locate knowledge of the divine in the understanding and development of human rationality and freedom. In short, ACP's grounding of their defence of theism in the writings of the pre-DCR Bhaskar is evidence of a commitment to TR adaptation of Kantian transcendental idealism for realist purposes of the sort that I outlined in my paper "Before Critical Realism: Kantian Empirical Metaphysics" (Agar 2005).

- <sup>4</sup> See Morris (1987). A more detailed treatment of Anselm's contribution to classical theism can be found in Davis and Leftow (2004).

- <sup>5</sup> For example, this idea of God as No-thing is the essential basis of Paul Tillich's radical theology. Tillich argues that the Anselmian God does not exist and the attendant meta-theistic arguments of this tradition – what he calls “theological theism” (Tillich 1952: 142; 1996: 32–33) – are actually contributions to atheism. The so-called “God of the Philosophers” rests on the ontological presumption that He is an object like any other. This way of conceptualising God encourages – and, Tillich thinks, demands – atheistic deconstructions when he argues that ‘atheism is justified as the reaction against theological theism and its disturbing implications’ (Tillich 1952: 185). In this sense, the defence of God actually requires the kind of attacks – based on the presumption that God is a *scientific hypothesis* – we have seen new atheists like Stenger (2007) and Dawkins (2006) mount against the God of meta-theism. Thus, for Tillich, God does not exist, since “existence” is an ontological category for objects. Instead, God must be seen as ontological category all His own that grounds, panentheistically, all that is.

- <sup>6</sup> It should be noted, however, that Houlgate does not appear to present his defence of the Christian credentials of Hegel in panentheistic terms. Rather, he should be seen as a contemporary disciple of the “Right Hegelian” tradition, which reconciles Hegelian thought with Anselmian theism in general and Lutheranism in particular. One cannot help but think that Houlgate’s insights would sit more comfortably within a panentheistic context, rather than the somewhat awkward negotiations that he makes with classical Christianity in the final chapter of this work.

- <sup>7</sup> For an excellent account of Schelling’s system, including his critical engagement with Spinoza, see White (1983).

- <sup>8</sup> I will argue that Bloch’s unique take on the famous dialectical materialist inversion of Hegel consists of positing materiality as enjoying primacy over freedom. I will argue that any such non-dualistic materialism is founded on Darwinian–Marxist process materialism where freedom is an emergent property of matter.

- <sup>9</sup> This passage is reproduced from his 1975 work *Hegel* (Taylor 1975: 89–90). Elsewhere in the text, he again uses this metaphor when he says that: ‘For the mature Hegel, man comes to himself as the vehicle of a larger spirit’ (Taylor 1975: 45).

- <sup>10</sup> Although we will see in the next chapter that this correction of the Hegelian literature does not mean Hegelianism is not susceptible to anthropomorphic errors. The logic of freedom at the heart of panentheism makes perfect sense, but unfortunately it is the logic of its idealist presuppositions that gets Hegel into some difficulties.

- <sup>11</sup> Fredrick Neuhouser usefully alludes to this point about degrees of rationality when discussing the unfolding of rationality in Hegel’s philosophy of history. Hegel’s detractors have often interpreted his identification of the rationality of all stages in political history as amounting to a defence of political practices and values that are inimical to modern liberal principles. Neuhouser captures our point that the detractors

seem to miss about the diminished and incomplete rational status of these past forms when he says that, for Hegel, ‘since this mode of philosophical understanding justifies the past by seeing it as a historically necessary condition of spirit’s achieving its supreme goal, it will regard some aspects of the past as *instrumentally* rational only – that is, necessary as a means to the full realisation of reason’s ends but not themselves part of a world where those ends are finally and perfectly achieved’ (Neuhouser 2000: 217 [emphasis in original]). As instrumentally rational only, such political structures are incomplete and logically incoherent under the terms of TI.

- 12 This is the key means of distinguishing Hegelian communitarianism from some more contemporary “cultural relativists”, as well as from the frankly absurd association with fascism. The social wholes within which individuals construct their sense of self are regulated by strict adherence to standards of universal rationality, including the insistence that individual self-determination of each and every citizen be respected.
- 13 So even within the narrow and truncated self of social contract liberalism, we see, despite itself, the presence of this thoroughly Hegelian concept upon which it is parasitic. We see echoes here of Bhaskar’s argument about how CM/HM theorisations of the truncated self characteristic of metaReality are parasitic on an underlying unity – i.e. the ground-state. The condition of sustaining individuality – of the individual achieving freedom and hence reality – is connecting with a deeper (or higher) reality of which he/she is a necessary part. It is in the very nature of the demi-real (or, in Hegelian language, the finite) to connect with the metaReality (or infinity) beyond it that sustains it. Perhaps we are looking here at a possible Hegelian interpretation of the Bhaskarian concept of the ground-state. The deeper reality that is uncovered beneath the demi-real of finite existence is that of freedom. The demi-real exists as such to the extent to which it frustrates, and is parasitic upon, the realisation of its own essential nature to transcend itself. Demi-reality is incorporated into a Hegelian framework by being interpreted as *finite* self-transcendence, and metaReality exists as finite self-transcendence.
- 14 As Neuhouser has pointed out, this could include a spiritual identification where the state performs the “godly” function of permitting the individual to transcend his/her finitude as a mortal creature and achieve immortality in an everlasting state (Neuhouser 2000: 215, 322).
- 15 The social contract is legitimised for Rousseau when the individual consciously affirms its principles as his/her own (i.e. social ends are identical with his/her own private ends). Indeed, it is with Rousseau (rather than with Kant) that the conception of freedom as self-determination originates, because for the former individual, freedom is possible only when the individual’s will is given concrete expression in social institutions. But unlike Kant, this harmonisation is not in terms of society’s ability to facilitate the realisation of asocial instrumental goals of its individual citizens. Rather, the individual freedom that Rousseau imagines is *internal* to the goals of the social whole in the sense that the individual defines him/herself as an individual through social participation. In other words, social participation is seen as, in and of itself, the goal of individuals, rather than a mere mechanism to realise external instrumental goals of the essentially asocial (as it is with Hobbes and Kant) or apolitical (Locke) self.

## 5 From transcendence to immanence

### The anthropological and materialist utopia of Ludwig Feuerbach

In this chapter, I wish to begin the process of looking beyond idealist metaReality by exploring some of the alternatives to idealist transcendence and utopia within the Hegelian tradition. First, I will construct a materialist interpretation of transcendence in the post-Hegelian (so-called “Left” Hegelian) School beginning with the writings of perhaps the most famous atheist of the nineteenth-century, Ludwig Feuerbach (1802–1872). He is a famous – if deemed (rather unfairly) merely transitional – figure in the history of post-Hegelianism as a useful critic of objective idealism. His most famous work *The Essence of Christianity* ([1841] 1854) (hereafter *EOC*) in particular is said to have influenced – but later was surpassed by – Karl Marx. One of my purposes in this chapter is to argue that this is a reputation that is scarcely deserved. First of all, it is not in *EOC* that the most important anticipation of historical materialism is to be found, but rather the works written in the post-1843 era. Second, we will see that these later works have enough to distinguish them from Marx and Engels to qualify Feuerbach as a systematic thinker in his own right. I argue that Feuerbach develops a system that is, on the one hand, distinct from Hegel and (although having much in common with) is also crucially divergent from Marx’s thinking. I think that, consequently, Feuerbach deserves recognition as more than an important but limited thinker. Nevertheless, there are sufficient weaknesses in the system. We will see in a moment that while the works up to and including the *EOC* period embrace a form of transcendence, it is unmistakably anthropological. But this does not mean that Feuerbach rejects meta-utopian thinking. In the next chapter, we will explore how his meta-anthropologism in *EOC* means that he is vulnerable to historical materialist criticisms. I also argue in the next chapter that although there is little evidence of a significant influence on the mature Marx by *EOC*, its presence is more obvious in the writings of some later Marxists in the twentieth-century who attempted to construct Marxism on the foundations provided by materialist transcendence. I have in mind the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. We will see that by 1846 Marx and Engels have developed a robust philosophical immanence that has more in common with the post-1843 Feuerbach and therefore it is this stage of the latter’s career that has more in common with historical materialism. By contrast, it is in the transcendental humanism of the *EOC* that we find the seeds of a materialist version of

metaReality that Feuerbach did not intend and would probably not endorse. In this, he holds the dubious distinction of being a hugely underrated critic of utopia who unwittingly contributed to the possibilities of it being developed in new directions by later Marxists.

This exploration of the significance for Marxism will occupy us in the next chapter. For now, it is important to perform some of the groundwork that will prepare the way for this discussion. In this chapter, we will see that in his critique of theology in general and Hegelian objective idealism in particular, Feuerbach is famous for a demolition of idealist transcendence and its replacement with an anthropological and atheistic doctrine, first of transcendence and then in his later years of immanence. In his early works however, prior to the emergence of these systems, he remains firmly in the terrain of Hegelian idealism. These youthful thoughts are important because, first, it is here that he develops a pantheistic critique of Hegel that performs important groundwork for the anthropologism that will be crucial for his later writings. Nevertheless, we will detect the presence of what we may call *extra-human* transcendence. In keeping with his pantheistic principles at this stage in the evolution of his thinking, Feuerbach wishes to discuss humanity's relationship with nature in terms of its wider participation in divine reality. It will not be until around 1839 that he finally rejects all "extra-human" significance and develops a consistent anthropologism. This does not mean that he rejects transcendence completely, but rather merely *ontological* transcendence. Nor does it mean that he rejects trans-humanism, because we will see his concept of humanity abstract from immediate species' life processes. This period includes *EOC* where epistemological and ontological categories that tend towards transcendence are reinterpreted (rather than rejected) as profoundly anthropological in the sense that they are statements not about reality as such, but about human *self*-understanding. In these works it is anthropological, because it is linked, so Feuerbach argues, to his so-called *species concept*. In this reductionist philosophical environment, there may seem little room for transcendence, as we will see some prominent Feuerbach scholars have pointed out. But I think there is still plenty of evidence of its presence in a more limited epistemological form where we detect the influence of Hegel's phenomenology. I will argue that it is not until his later works that immanence emerges, especially *The Essence of Religion* ([1845] 2004) (hereafter *EOR*) and the *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* ([1851] 1967) (hereafter *LOER*). This is where he locates his anthropologism in a wider naturalism and materialism in response (in part) to criticism that it was not sufficiently distinguished from the immanentist Hegelianism that was a dominant feature of Left Hegelianism. This is not to say that naturalism was not present in the earlier works, merely that it was undeveloped. What was unique in the post-*EOC* writings was an anthropocentric materialism and naturalism that was potently anti-Hegelian in scope. I will argue that this is the environment where a fully-fledged immanence flourished. This is where Feuerbach leaves Hegel behind at last and is consequently free to develop a consistently anti-transcendence position, as we will see. It is in these later – largely ignored – works that Feuerbach's greatest contribution to

anti-meta-utopianism is to be found and his status as a thinker who can step out from the shadows of Hegel is secured.

This does not mean that his completed system is above reproach. I will argue that the triumph of immanence is at the expense of a lapse into a rather unconvincing empirical realism that suffers from the deficiencies common to those epistemologies that fail to acknowledge what we have seen Bhaskar refer to as transfactuality. That is, it fails to meet key 1M criteria. I finish the chapter on a positive note from Feuerbach's perspective by arguing that there is something of a paradox to his later works. We will see that his abandonment of his infinite species concept was in response to criticisms that it was a secularisation of theological ideas. The anthropological sensualism and naturalism that replaced it was meant to sharpen up his anti-religious credentials. A key aspect of the new system is the idea of the permanence of the "otherness" of nature and our conditions of dependency as a species on it. This is when he abandons transhumanism completely. We will see that because Feuerbach links religious projection so closely to this dependency, the consequence is the permanence of the religious condition. In this regard, it is the later Feuerbach that makes the most important contribution to immanent post-secular thought as I have defined it.

I also wish to say something about the implications that Feuerbach's thinking has for social and political philosophy, just as I did so in the last chapter with Hegelian subject panentheism. Although not famed as a political thinker, it seems his later writings will have profoundly important political implications. We will see that the anthropocentric sensualist focus on the species concept commits Feuerbach to radical egalitarianism, communitarianism and even radical ecologism.

## **From SEPC to SEPM I: Feuerbach's critique of Hegel**

Feuerbach's intellectual movement from a critical engagement with Hegel that remained within a broadly objective idealist framework to a final departure that culminated in his own system was not a brief overnight conversion, but rather a complex evolution towards materialism and naturalism. More easy to identify is his lifelong commitment to humanism. Indeed, his doctoral dissertation, *Reason: Its Unity, Universality and Infinity* (1828), was a clear attempt to adhere to Hegelian orthodoxy in its defence of the ontological primacy of Absolute Reason to such an extent that Marx Wartofsky describes it as 'a thoroughly Hegelian exercise' (Wartofsky 1977: 28). However, this affinity existed only insofar as objective idealism could be utilised in the service of clear humanist concepts (Johnston 1995: 55; Wartofsky 1977: xviii). We will recall that Hegel argued that finite individual human beings contained as part of their essence the transcendence of finite sensuousness in unity with Absolute Spirit. But it was over the definition of the latter that marked Feuerbach's importance to what would become known as the thoroughly unorthodox *Left Hegelian* movement of radical intellectuals of the late 1830s and early 1840s, which included Karl Marx and

Friedrich Engels. Absolute Spirit is interpreted by Feuerbach not so much in terms more closely associated with Right Hegelian theism or even (the more accurate) panentheistic reading of Hegel as making reference to a divine super-subject, but in terms of a universal species concept. In this regard, it was in this early Hegelian phase that Feuerbach began developing the core concepts of his later post-Hegelian system. What were initially given life by Hegelian logic would soon become key tools in Feuerbach's evolution beyond the confines and (as we shall shortly see) deficiencies of objective idealism.

Universal Spirit is the essence of humankind considered as a species that transcends particular sensuous individuals. The concept of finite self-transcendence is here given a thoroughly humanist interpretation and application. In immediate sense-perception, there is mere individuality in that physical sensations are the properties of each individual person or, as Feuerbach himself puts it, '[s]ense-perception in and for itself remains forever mine alone, and is locked within the boundaries of the *I*' (Feuerbach 1828, cited in Wartofsky 1977: 31). My perceptions of pleasure and pain are exclusively my own. But this individuality, this means of distinguishing myself from others as a distinct entity, is cancelled or rather overcome once I begin to describe these sensations to another person – a *Thou*. In so describing, the other person can recognise my thoughts as his or her own. What is crucial here is that in thinking, I am still having *my own* thoughts in that they are occurring to me as an individual and yet at the same time they transcend my individuality (Feuerbach 1828, cited in Wartofsky 1977: 32). There is nothing more my own than my thoughts, yet they are simultaneously recognised by other people as their own or, as Feuerbach argues, 'to think is to differentiate one's self-unity, to be dual, within the content of the highest unity, and vise-versa' (Feuerbach 1828, cited in Wartofsky 1977: 32). Thought gives my being as an individual a new perspective, a sense in which I am not just a finite sensuous entity, but part of something communal, which Feuerbach calls *my species nature*. In true Hegelian logic, he insists that my purpose and essence as a finite being is to transcend my finite being in the recognition of my species identity. My awareness of myself as an "I" (my self-awareness) is at the same time an awareness of myself in a "Thou" (awareness of my species-being). There is a unity of subject (the "I" that is the thinking individual) with the not-I (the *Thou* that is other people) in thought. As Hegelian logic would have it, this is a unity, because the other is of the same essence as the thought activity, but merely its other-sidedness. Moreover, as we have seen in the last chapter, this transcendence of individuality is also its affirmation, because in negating my sensuous individuality I am realising my essence as a species individual or, as Feuerbach argues, 'in thinking, the other is *in myself*' (Feuerbach 1828, cited in Wartofsky 1977: 35). In other words, my determination as an individual resides in my awareness of my universality as a member of the species. This is Feuerbach's rejection of ontological naturalist individualism based on sensibility and feeling (where an individual is a member of any conceivable community only in an aggregative sense, as we have seen) in favour of this species conception where individuality is conceived precisely in the transcendence of particularity.

We might even venture that he transforms Descartes' famous “*cogito, ergo sum*” into “*cogito, ergo omnes sum homines*” (“I think, therefore I am all men”).

In his earliest writing, Feuerbach is applying the concept of finite self-transcendence to the matter of formulating a conception of human species-being that is realised in the activity of pure thought. But I think it is an incomplete understanding of the concept. On the one hand, he recognises the Hegelian imperative to protect and strengthen individuality, as we have just seen. And yet on the other hand, he appears to presume that species-being exists quite independently of the particularities of our individuality. (I will say more about this inconsistency in Feuerbach's early idealism in a moment.) Nevertheless, the Hegelian logic that he uses to formulate his species concept has communitarian political implications just as it had for Hegel himself, as we saw in the last chapter. The impulse of pure thinking activity that is the original unity of the species is necessarily communitarian. By contrast, nature, as the other of Spirit, is the domain of pure sensuous particularity of discreet finite individuals that is overcome, as we have just seen, via human thinking activity where I–Thou distinctions are dissolved. It follows therefore that thought is a property of community, rather than the sensuous individual as such:

As Reason is a communal thing, not an inborn property of single individuals, so man, unless he lives in a community, cannot attain to Reason. He comes to Reason not by himself, but through the actual presence of Reason in the form of a living community.... The origins of Reason, insofar as they are present in single human beings, can only be understood in terms of the totality of mankind.... There must therefore be some way in the depths of man in which the yearning for the Thou can be fulfilled: where the *I* and the *Thou* are no longer counterposed... such a unity only exists in thought.

(Feuerbach 1828, cited in Wartofsky 1977: 44)

The *Dissertation* is an important starting position for our study of Feuerbach's relation to Hegel, because in his use of the latter's logic in the construction of his species concept he is, implicitly at least, rejecting the idea of super-human transcendence. We have the beginnings of Feuerbach's anthropological critique of Hegelianism expressed here as the rejection of panentheism (which I argued was the orthodox Hegelian position in the last chapter).<sup>1</sup> This critique, implicit as it largely is in the *Dissertation*, becomes explicit in the book that abolished any hope Feuerbach had in securing academic employment in the conservative Hegelian culture of the German academy at the time of its publication. I am speaking of his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* ([1830] 1980) (hereafter *TDI*).

In this work, Feuerbach's main target is Christianity, which he regards as the archetypal religion of the subjective egoist. As such, it represents the greatest threat to sensuous individuality's reconciliation with the species-essence. He makes a link between the individualism of the subjective egoist and a belief in personal immortality that is a typical feature of Christian doctrine. He compares Christian belief and culture unfavourably to Ancient Greek and Roman societies,

which lacked commitment to personal immortality. The explanation for the difference is that the Greeks and Romans lacked a sense of individuality equivalent to its modern status in Christian society, especially since the Reformation (Feuerbach 1980: 6–10, §1–6). The ascent of Protestant man in his solitary relationship with God and eschewing of the communal spiritualism that had at least sustained the medieval Catholic Church's engagement with immortality myths was the triumph of the particular over the universal, the isolated ego over the community of the species. Feuerbach argues that this can be seen in the fact that

the focal point of the Protestant believer was Christ, the God-man ... the person but not yet the concept of the person as person, within which each person is included without distinction; it was the person only as the single, world-historical person of Christ.

(Feuerbach 1980: 10, §6)

There was an insistence that visions of moral perfection are indexed to empirical individuals, who are simultaneously – and precisely because of their sensuous particularity – regarded as incapable of measuring up to those perfections. Thus, the individual 'clings to his particular individuality as an absolute' (Feuerbach 1980: 13, §9) necessitating the delay of the attainment of moral perfection until he/she is freed from sensuousness in the afterlife (Feuerbach 1980: 15, §12). This is immensely damaging for Feuerbach, because it encourages individuals to think of their earthly life as nothingness, a life 'rendered without being, without unity, without Spirit, without soul' (Feuerbach 1980: 14, §11). It was Protestant Christianity, therefore, with its reconciliation of the subjectivity of the sensuous ego with the transcendent that was the final retreat from the realisation of our species nature – the this-worldly universal subject expounded in the *Dissertation*. Christianity's doctrine of personal immortality was effectively the elevation of the sensuous (unthinking) individual to the divine. If we have the courage to abandon the doctrine, then we are committed to the principle that once our sensuousness is dissolved, so then is our individuality and we are once more absorbed fully into the species universal. This requires acknowledging finitude (sensuous particularity) as the real and only condition of our individuality. This, in turn, requires acknowledgement that death is the real and final act of our individuality and not some illusory moment in the passage towards individual moral perfection in another world:

Only when the human once again recognises that there exists not merely an *appearance of death*, but an actual and real death, a death that completely terminates the life of the individual, only when he returns to the awareness of his finitude will he gain the courage to begin a new life and experience the pressing need for making that which is absolutely true and substantial, that which actually infinite, into the theme and content of his entire spiritual activity.

(Feuerbach 1980: 17, §14 [emphasis in original])

None of this self-awareness of what Feuerbach takes to be the true infinite – Infinite Reason – is possible so long as we labour with an illusory individualism that comes from the doctrine of personal immortality. Once dispensed with, we become free to realise our species individualism in the I–Thou relation of thinking activity.

Thus far, this all sounds like some sort of Kantian categorical imperative. But Feuerbach was, at this stage in his career, a committed Hegelian and had no time for dualistic philosophy, let alone a system of thought that was predicated precisely in the elevation of subjective egoism to transcendent status characteristic of Christianity. So how would it be possible to define Infinite Reason in terms of thinking activity while avoiding Kantian pitfalls? The answer was simple. Feuerbach opted for an immanentist approach to the reconciliation of finite particularity with Infinite Reason, which his species concept was supposed to achieve. Humanity's saving comprehension of this unity of the particular with the universal was to be provided by that dimension of existence Kant had deemed purely that of sensuous individuality – Nature. Nature was itself the domain of the Infinite into which the subjective ego was dissolved upon death. What we have here is thus an immanentist and pantheistic application of Hegelian logic. But it was also in many ways a departure from Hegelianism, because Feuerbach was increasingly coming to the view that the realisation of the system would require some fairly serious revision of its core concepts, not least the relationship between Absolute Spirit and nature. So long as the latter retained its status as “other”, Hegel's logic would retain a dualistic streak that rendered it vulnerable to Christian appropriation, whereas what was needed was the transition to a post-Christian culture, which a revised Hegelian system alone could accomplish.<sup>2</sup> Once again, we may note Feuerbach's tendency to identify a theistic thread running through Hegel's treatment of his own system as the probable reason why he saw the presence of duality. The possibility of a pantheistic Hegel seems to have eluded Feuerbach as it has done most other Hegel scholars.

What makes *TDI* such an important text to consider for our purposes in this chapter concerns one particular conceptual revision that was undertaken within its pages – the reconciliation of logic with nature. As a pantheist, Feuerbach was committed to the rejection of Hegel's idea that the definition of nature as the negation of pure thought was derived from the logical dictates of self-determining rationality. We discussed this in the last chapter as the necessary connection between Hegel's concept of Being and freedom – the theory of True Infinity. Although Feuerbach was still an idealist at this stage, he makes a critical observation that will be the foundation of the subsequent evolution of his thought towards materialism and naturalism. He rejects the primacy of pure thought and instead insists that nature must be seen as an *external* reality, rather than an emergent property of the Idea in its quest for self-determination. His pantheistic instincts at this stage encourage him to be sceptical of any suggestion that entertains the idea of rationality's autonomy from nature. With reference to the self-consciousness of the individual human being, he argues that ‘he is not

just person, self-conscious, but he is and possesses in himself that from which he distinguishes himself, that in distinction from which he is self-distinguishing person, self-consciousness; he is, and possesses within himself, nature, soul, essence' (Feuerbach 1980: 25, §24). With implicit reference to Anselmian and Right Hegelian definitions of God's Personhood, he declares his immanentist grasp of the divine:

Mere personhood on its own is just as spiritless as mere nature on its own; Spirit is only the unity of soul and consciousness, or – what is the same – the unity of nature and personhood.... Therefore, to make personhood into the only determination of God is to make spiritlessness and soulessness into determinations of God.

(Feuerbach 1980: 26, §24)

Nevertheless, there is reason to suspect a fairly limited pantheism in *TDI*. Larry Johnston (1995) has found reason to doubt that Feuerbach sticks to a consistent pantheistic position. He contends that Feuerbach's species individualism – where the consciousness of the particular individual is only the presence of the world historical consciousness of the universal – seems to presuppose a self-sufficient spirituality that is difficult to reconcile with the immanentist thrust of pantheism. We discussed in the last chapter how this was also irreconcilable with Hegelian logic. Sure enough, in places Feuerbach appears to adhere to the non-pantheistic "vehicle" metaphor for Spirit that inevitably ensues once we adopt this reading of Hegelian logic. When he says things like '[h]istory ... is a continuous process of universal recollection, in which Spirit transforms into itself individuals, independent existences' (Feuerbach 1980: 129, §142) or 'Spirit, possesses an existence that is independent of the existence of all individuals and ... humanity possesses an existence that is independent of ... determinate, present individuals' (Feuerbach 1980: 137, §151), one is tempted to agree with this critical observation. Johnston suggests that the reason for the inconsistency is because Feuerbach's primary concern in writing and (anonymously) publishing *TDI* was to 'disabuse individuals of their faith in immortality' (Johnston 1995: 65), so rather than being a principled pantheist, he found instrumental value in it as regards deconstructing arguments in defence of personal immortality. What Johnston seems to be suggesting here is that Feuerbach's idealism took the form of a muddle, straddling pantheistic and "orthodox" Hegelian definitions of Absolute Spirit as it suited his polemical purposes.

The tensions may be explained by the presence of another variable – an emerging humanism that was undeveloped in *TDI*, but would come to flourish in *EOC* once Feuerbach had abandoned idealism of any stripe – pantheistic or Hegelian. In places in *TDI*, he suggests that a fundamental aspect of species unity, rather than humankind's reliance on functioning as a vehicle for Spirit, is the much more immanent concern with our own efforts at securing genuinely communal relations with each other. In such circumstances, love replaces rationality (and death) as the means of reconciling finite sensuousness with infinite

consciousness. Love is the key means of attaining I–Thou unity it seems: ‘you love, not with your personhood ... but only in and with essence, which is being together.... Love is the unity of personhood and essence’ (Feuerbach 1980: 29, §29). And this essence is not one (transcendent) entity, but rather the (immanent) community of humankind: ‘the species, the essence ... is not existence in its singleness ... but is existence in its totality, is existence as all single phenomena taken together’ (Feuerbach 1980: 94, §102–103). This move away from the Hegelian idea of the actualisation of *divine* self-consciousness and towards *humanity’s* self-consciousness as a natural and spiritual species is completed in *EOC*. What were taken to be divine properties in his early works are now seen as exclusively species concepts. The passage from idealism (Hegelian and pantheistic) to an explicit materialist anthropologism is the unmistakable feature of *EOC* and is the philosophical position for which Feuerbach is most famous. (That it is also far from being his most important contribution to materialism and naturalism is an argument that will be of considerable importance to our purposes in the construction of an anti-transcendence materialism.)

We have seen Feuerbach hold to an immanentist pantheist reading of Absolute Spirit. Although he has no grasp of the concept of TI (finite self-transcendence), we can reasonably deduce that he would regard it, too, as anthropomorphic. That the Infinite is finite man’s transcendence of his limitations would render TI vulnerable to Feuerbach’s criticism of idealism as the absolutising of a particular system of human logic. The key text here (which is foundational for the trajectory of *EOC*) is *Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy* ([1839] 2003) (hereafter *TCHP*).<sup>3</sup> In it, Feuerbach outlines a fundamental shift in what, in his estimation, the foundations and purposes of philosophy should be. The centrality of the species concept and species consciousness to his thinking was causing Feuerbach to become suspicious of any philosophical claim to give us access to any extra-human reality. Any worldview that attempted this – such as theology – was merely the unwarranted imposition onto independent reality of a structure of human thought. Founded, as it was and as we have seen, on subject panentheism, it is not hard to imagine that Hegel’s logic uncovered more about the structure of a specific human conception of freedom than it did about the nature of reality itself. Presuppositionless logic, then, was less an insight into Being than an insight into how anthropomorphic and trans-human delusions have been part of the staple diet of human thought for centuries. Instead, Feuerbach had more modest ambitions for philosophy – it was simply an important contribution to the production of species knowledge. Its foundations were therefore not in the uncovering of the Absolute, which in reality was merely the work of the anthropomorphic subjective ego, but in human sensuous experience.

Nature and history are therefore accorded independent existences, rather than being made up of mere “moments” in the dialectical unfolding of Absolute Spirit. As anthropomorphic, the latter is but a product of a specific, historically limited and conditional conception of a particular philosophy – one in a long line that has attempted to make sense of humanity’s place in the world and in the

process foisted that understanding onto the world. In this sense, Hegelianism has much in common with theology and is, in fact, the most advanced attempt to rationalise theological consciousness. In the absence of a specific treatment by Feuerbach of the interpretation of TI undertaken in the last chapter, we might venture that he would have thought of it as the supreme rationalisation of the theological concept of Christian panentheism. It is an attempt to work out the logical deficiencies of Anselmian theism, so as to arrive at an intellectually robust concept of God and nature that can satisfy the demands of the enhanced system of logic that Hegelianism introduces. It seems our panentheistic Hegel is as vulnerable to the charge of “rational mysticism” (Feuerbach 2003) as the theistic Hegel of Feuerbach’s own interpretation. Hegelianism, like Christianity, has presented itself as the final word on philosophical truth:

Christianity – and, to be sure, taken in its historical-dogmatic development – is determined as absolute religion. In the interest of such a determination, however, only the difference of Christianity from other religions is accentuated, thus neglecting all that is common to all of them; that is, the nature of religion which, as the only absolute condition, lies at the base of all the different religions. The same is true of philosophy. The Hegelian philosophy ... is defined and proclaimed as absolute philosophy; i.e., as nothing less than philosophy itself.... Thus, recently, a Hegelian – and a sagacious and thoughtful person at that – has sought to demonstrate – ceremoniously and, in his own way, thoroughly – that the Hegelian philosophy ‘is the absolute reality of the idea of philosophy’.

(Feuerbach 2003)

The task of philosophy, Feuerbach tells us, is to expose the historical limitations of such a move just as it had exposed the limitations of Anselmian theism (among other theologies). Hegelianism must be stripped of its self-appointed status as the final absolute truth and shown for what it is – a historically specific, rationalist hypostatisation of religious consciousness.

In order to understand this criticism, we need to understand Feuerbach’s deconstruction of the ontological pretensions of Hegel’s Idea. We saw in the last chapter how Absolute Spirit grasped in terms of TI was, in part, the result of Hegel’s denial that Schelling’s Absolute Identity could be unconditioned. It was instead self-differentiating. For Feuerbach, Absolute Spirit is but a stage in the development of thought *in this tradition*. And we know that it is a tradition going back to Kant and Fichte:

Hegel polemicized against the Absolute of Schelling; he thought it lacked the moment of reflection, apprehension, and negativity. In other words, he imbued the Absolute Identity with Spirit, introduced determinations into it, and fructified its womb with the semen of the Notion (the ego of Fichte). But he, nevertheless, took the truth of the Absolute for granted. He had no quarrel with the existence or the objective reality of Absolute Identity;

he actually took for granted that Schelling's philosophy was, in its essence, a true philosophy. All he accused it of was that it lacked form. Hence, Hegel's relationship to Schelling is the same as that of Fichte to Kant. To both the true philosophy was already in existence, both in content and substance; both were motivated by a purely 'scientific,' that is, in this case, systematic and formal interest. Both were critics of certain specific qualities of the existing philosophy, but not at all of its essence. That the Absolute existed was beyond all doubt.

(Feuerbach 2003)

What emerges here that is foundational for Feuerbach's thought is, first, he is denying the presuppositionless pretensions of Hegelian logic. It is imperative therefore to 'undertake to demonstrate that the Hegelian philosophy is really a definite and special kind of philosophy ... however much this philosophy is distinguished from all previous philosophies by its rigorous scientific character, universality, and incontestable richness of thought' (Feuerbach 2003). Second, he is insisting that this is characteristic of all philosophy, including his own. In particular, the fundamental presupposition of philosophy is its purpose in helping us gain human knowledge in the sense of helping us interpret our experiences in the world:

Every presentation of philosophy, whether oral or written, is to be taken and can only be taken in the sense of a means. Every system is only an expression or image of reason, and hence only an object of reason, an object which reason – a living power that procreates itself in new thinking beings – distinguishes from itself and posits as an object of criticism. Every system that is not recognized and appropriated as just a means, limits and warps the mind for it sets up the indirect and formal thought in the place of the direct, original, and material thought.

(Feuerbach 2003)

Far from Being in itself, it is *human* being that is the subject of philosophy (and theology). The absolute truth of religion and philosophy is therefore reduced to species truth. The instrumental epistemological basis of his anthropologism is made clear in these passages.

Hegelianism's claim that the fallible and finite processes of human thought participate in an ideal absolute is replaced with this much more modest contention that recognises the irresolvable human character of rationality. This is the first decisive evidence of Feuerbach's materialism. He tells us that, in true idealist fashion, Hegel posits the pre-existence of rationality, but by deconstructing its presuppositionless basis and identifying its definite, determinate character, Feuerbach is arguing that it is, in fact, an emergent product of our material existence. Now, although Hegel's subject panentheism might protect him from the accusation of holding to a view of "pre-existing" rationality, it does nothing to inoculate him against anthropomorphism. Indeed, in true anthropomorphic

fashion, Hegel's TI mistakes the logical structure of reality (i.e. freedom) as something more than the structure of determinate human logic; in so doing, 'he does not appeal to the intellect within us' (Feuerbach 2003). There is simply no evidence that reality is, as it is, systematically presented by Hegel, not least because it contradicts sensuous perception (what is called in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* ([1807] 1977) (hereafter *PS*) the *Understanding*), which he thinks the structure of language shows as indeterminate or "general" being.<sup>4</sup> Feuerbach is not impressed by this attempt to refute the immediacy of sense experience. The fact that language always expresses universals and sense experience is focused on particulars has no bearing on the ontological status of either. Indeed, from the point of view of sensuousness, it is language that is unreal. He alludes to the presuppositions of his own humanist materialism by dryly adding: 'otherwise we would have to feed ourselves on mere words instead of on things in life' (Feuerbach 2003). His starting point will not be the anthropomorphic speculation of TI, even when it is presented panentheistically, but human material need that is a constant feature of our sensuous existence. He begins with what is given in immediate sensuousness – the causes of phenomena that can be attributed only to nature – and so his newly emergent materialism embraces what he calls *genetico-criticism*: 'genetico-critical philosophy is mainly concerned with those things that are otherwise called secondary causes' (Feuerbach 2003). The realm of secondary causes is, of course, nature, which for Feuerbach is the ultimate reality, given the facts of our existence as bounded, finite, natural beings. Included within these causes are both the physical causes of natural events that are empirically manifest and the psychological causes of our ideas and concepts (which would include the need for religious belief and objective idealism's anthropomorphic imposition of the structure of logic onto Being). Given this restriction, any further speculation regarding our ontological status is less than helpful:

All speculation that would rather go beyond nature and man is therefore futile – as futile as the kind of art that would like to give us something higher than human form, but gives us only distortions.... Philosophy is the science of reality in its truth and totality. However, the all-inclusive and all-encompassing reality is nature (taken in the most universal sense of the word). The deepest secrets are to be found in the simplest natural things, but, pining away for the Beyond, the speculative fantast treads them under his feet. The only source of salvation lies in a return to nature.

(Feuerbach 2003)

Nature and the system of needs that we have evolved as a species emergent from, and dependent on, it provides the limits of our universe and the presuppositions of our philosophical attempts to understand our place in it. We have here the groundwork for a post-Hegelian naturalist humanist universalism that is the context in which Feuerbach's most famous work (*EOC*) was written.<sup>5</sup> It is this newly won materialist position that in his later works he combines with an antipathy towards

transcendence to rid philosophy of all vestiges of meta-utopia – infinite teleology, eschatology and trans-humanist visions of the perfectibility of humanity. Meta-utopia remains a feature of his system in the *EOC* and *PPF*, because, as we will now see, his rejection of Hegelianism is restricted to the repudiation of extra-human ontology. As such, he retains a version of transcendence, but just divested of the wider cosmic significance of the development of human self-consciousness. To be sure, the groundwork for his later naturalism is evident here, just as the renunciation of ontology that he develops here existed in embryonic form in *TDI*.

### **Echoes of Hegel: Feuerbach's species-ontology in the early 1840s**

I said above that Feuerbach's early idealism used a deficient concept of transcendence – i.e. one that was vulnerable to the Hegelian critique that transcendence must take the form of finite self-transcendence of the intra-relationality of finite and infinite that we discussed in the last chapter. The irony is that once he developed a thoroughgoing atheism by the time of *EOC*, he appeared to operate with a more logically robust version of transcendence to illuminate his species concept.

The genetico-critical method, as we have just seen, restricts the remit of philosophy to the domain of the human experience of the world. It is important not to confuse this with a simple empiricism on Feuerbach's part, because he is not presuming a role for passive reflection in our understandings of our place in the world. Rather, what Hegelianism and the other systems of thought that were its precursors in the history of anthropomorphic philosophy have shown is that we are active creatures in the natural world from which we have emerged. In this sense, we are, as one of nature's products, the supreme object of our contemplation – our existence as creative, active creatures, both physically and psychologically. This is the foundation of Feuerbach's species-ontology. As we will now see, this Hegelian inheritance is the cause of the persistence of transcendence, albeit in truncated form. Finite self-transcendence is divested of its ontological importance and given only epistemological status. This restriction is the terrain of Feuerbach's naturalism. The conditions of our emergence from nature are also the boundaries to our species potential. We can never escape these conditions and to suppose we can is, for Feuerbach, an illusion that has blighted systems of thought that entertain a role for ontological transcendence. But the fact that he still uses this key Hegelian concept means that, at this stage, he holds to an undeveloped naturalism. His continued Hegelianism may be the means of avoiding a crude empiricism, but it is also the means whereby he remains impressed by transcendence, albeit one divested of its ontological significance. His naturalism, once developed, will be the defining contribution he makes to materialist philosophy of the nineteenth century. It is what distinguishes his thinking from both the idealist tradition from which he emerged and the Marxist tradition on which he exerted so much influence. It will be my contention in the remainder of this chapter that the species naturalism, if we may call it that, that he formulates

in this period and refines in his later works is something uniquely his own. The neglect of his system is the basis of the unfortunate tendency for those both sympathetic with, and critical of, his work to either dismiss him as a thinker of little lasting significance to German philosophy or as a mere bridge between Hegel and Marx (or both). It is my intention to demonstrate how this reputation is hardly deserved and that Feuerbach is a vitally important philosopher when considering the limitations of transcendence and even non-transcendent forms of utopia. In short, the Feuerbach from this period (roughly 1839 onwards) first formulates ideas that will make him – in his later works particularly – a vitally important theorist of anti-meta-utopia and so must be considered a formidable opponent to doctrines steeped in meta-utopian thought, such as objective idealism, PMR and, as we will see in the next chapter, Bloch's transcendental materialism.

Feuerbach's rejection of vulgar empiricism is important in establishing his credentials as a thinker worthy of more respect than he has been accustomed to. In stating his materialist inversion of objective idealism from *TCHP* onwards – his insistence that being is prior to thought and therefore is determinate – he is attributing ontological primacy to the conditions of sensuous experience. As he tells us in the preface to the second edition of *EOC*, in contrast to idealism, 'for my thought I require the senses, especially sight; I found my ideas on materials which can be appropriated only through the activity of the senses. I do not generate the object from thought, but thought from the object' (Feuerbach 1854: vi [emphasis in original]). But with genetico-criticism, this is not an endorsement of a simple unreflective empiricism, but what Wartofsky has described as 'an empirically and naturalistically oriented rationalism (or a rationally oriented empiricism) ... in which the particular evidence of the senses serves to discipline the speculative insights of the human mind' (Wartofsky 1977: 193). That is, rather than dissolving objective idealism into a perfunctory empiricism, Feuerbach wishes to incorporate the insights it reveals about the interpretation of the world into a philosophical system that is under the discipline of sensuousness. This is the crucial distinction between anthropomorphism – where the structure of logic is taken as constitutive of objectivity – and *anthropocentrism* – where our rationality is seen as oriented to the system of species' needs. Logic functions not to uncover the structure of absolute truth, but rather the psychology of human concept formation. As he explains in his short book *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* ([1843] 1986) (hereafter *PPF*), the task of his species-ontology is to recover the system of human need that lies behind the structure of thought:

The philosophy of the future has the task of leading philosophy from the realm of 'departed souls' back into the realm of embodied living souls; of pulling philosophy from the divine, self-sufficient bliss in the realm of ideas into human misery. To this end, it needs nothing more than human understanding and human speech.

(Feuerbach 1986: 3)

As we pass from the realm of self-sufficient ideas into ‘human misery’, we pass from presuppositionless thought to the system of empirically grounded species’ needs from which thought emerges. Thus, religious consciousness (including its philosophical rationalisation in objective idealism) is (or rather has been) the traditional means whereby humanity has explored and expressed its deepest self-consciousness.

In keeping with our observation that Feuerbach embraces this naturalistic rationalism, we can detect here less of an outright rejection of Hegelian methodology as a restriction of its remit to the domain of epistemology or concept formation in the human consciousness. As Wartofsky (1977) and Harvey (1997) have noted, this is the epistemological truncation of Hegel’s phenomenological method developed in *PS* (Harvey 1997: 35; Wartofsky 1977: 206). What is more, the Hegelian resonance extends beyond simple methodological adaptation. There are clear echoes of historicism as well. If the subject of the dialectic is human species-being rather than the Idea, then this retains Hegel’s principle that the culmination of human historical development is reached when self-consciousness is attained. The only departure – albeit a significant one – is that its wider cosmic importance is dispensed with as we remain content in complete knowledge of species-essence.

The philosophical device that gives sanction to historicism – finite self-transcendence – is, we might also say, retained, if shorn of its idealist ontological credentials. What we are transcending in concept formation is our bare sensuous individuality as we attain unity with our species nature. This point is important to Feuerbach’s intentions in *EOC* and *PPF*, because it reveals the dynamics of the species dialectic he develops. As Hegel tells us in *PS*, the secret of developing self-consciousness is the awareness of the intersubjectivity of our existence as human beings.<sup>6</sup> We are aware of ourselves (self-consciousness) only insofar as we are aware of others. This includes awareness of what we share with others in common and so we are unique amongst all sentient beings in our awareness of our membership of a species. It seems that Feuerbach wants to retain this basic Hegelian phenomenology that we saw influence the communitarianism of *TDI* with its rejection of Cartesian dualism and replacement with the monistic I–Thou principle: *cogito, ergo omnes sum homines*. We have seen that a major part of this influence was the Hegelian point that part of what we share in common is consciousness. We saw above that this was the means whereby we achieve species knowledge. The difference is that this is now given materialist and empiricist application: ‘Only sensuous beings affect one another. I am an “I” for myself and simultaneously a “thou” for others. This I am, however, only as a sensuous being’ (Feuerbach 1986: 52). The condition of self-consciousness is now the encounter with other material (i.e. flesh and blood) individuals, rather than merely, as it was in *TDI*, other people as bearers of consciousness. This physical limitation on self-consciousness – for it is this that makes it bounded and finite – is what Hegel had devalued. The existentialist duality of subject and object is not the temporary condition of consciousness produced by the self-differentiation of Spirit, but rather is real. Ontological primacy is given here to

the sensuous experience of other people as objects in nature prior to, and the condition of, conscious self-reflection. Thought is derived from being not vice versa and so Feuerbach is resolving the deficiencies of the Kantian dualism in the opposite way to Hegel by insisting on the distinction – central to philosophical realism, as we have seen in earlier chapters – between what we experience and what exists independently of that experience (Johnston 1995: 101). What is real is not a product of thought – either Kant's "object-for-us" or Hegel's Idea – but active, sensuous human beings in nature. The accusation levelled at objective idealism for its anthropomorphism is evident once again in this distinction between being and thought, reality and knowledge. Whereas the former involves the quite unwarranted ontological identity of the two, Feuerbach is here presenting the case for a rationalist empiricist identity where thought is grounded in, and dependent on, material being.

As we have just seen, this materialist identity is made possible by Feuerbach's phenomenologically truncated application of finite self-transcendence.<sup>7</sup> This is what we have just seen Wartofsky call his *rational empiricism* where thought is emergent from, and conditioned by, the laws of matter. But perhaps it is unfair to label Feuerbach an empiricist of any stripe. The thought-being distinction that Feuerbach emphasises is very important here, because it means that we should not confuse the privileged role that he gives our sensuous encounter with reality with direct knowledge or "truth". Reality as it appears to us through the senses is objective, but it is always followed by an act of interpretation in accordance with our species' needs. This is, of course, not an *a priori* structure that we impose onto sense-data that transforms the object-for-itself that is its source into the object-for-us. We know that Feuerbach is no Kantian. What Feuerbach is saying is that the way things appear to us in sense experience is interpreted in accordance with our needs as a species. I am going to call this, not a perfunctory empiricism, but *anthropocentric sensualism*. Crucially, these interpretations can be – and often are – distorted reflections of these needs. In *PPF*, he draws this distinction between sense-data that is always objective and the act of interpretation, which he calls the *conception* of sensed objects:

Men first see things only as they appear to them and not as they are; they do not see themselves in the objects, but only their imaginations of the objects; they posit their own essence in them and do not differentiate the object from the conception of it. The imagination lies closer to the uneducated and subjective man than does intuition, for in intuition he is torn away from himself, whereas in the conception he remains within himself.

(Feuerbach 1986: 60)

The "subjective man" is the individual, not as he or she is as a member of the species, but as an isolated person. It is in this context that distortions are likely. Feuerbach's famous theory of projection is relevant here, because by distortion he means the act of 'posit[ing] their own essence' in the sensed objects, thereby 'not distinguishing the object and the conception of it'. It is only when the

individual ‘is extricated from himself’ that he or she is able to arrive at distortion-free perceptions of sensuous reality. And this extrication involves inter-subjective mediation. The process of knowledge formation must be social. We have seen that the communal context was important to species consciousness in *TDI* and it is no less so in this newly developed sensualism. Undistorted knowledge arises only when human beings transcend the limitations of their individuality and adopt species consciousness. And in inter-subjectively rising to the sensuous apprehension of species’ needs, we are making our species nature itself a key object of our senses. Feuerbach summarises his position quite well in *PPF*:

Not only ‘external’ things are objects of the senses. Man is given to himself only through the senses; he is an object of himself only through the senses.... Thus ... not only the object but also the ego are objects of the senses.... Thus, empiricism rightly derives the origin of our ideas from the senses; only it forgets that the most important and essential sense object of man is man himself; it forgets that only in man’s glimpse into man is the light of consciousness and understanding kindled. Idealism is, therefore, in the right when it looks for the origin of the ideas in man; but it is in the wrong when it wants to derive them from the isolated man determined as soul and as a being existing for himself, in short when it wants to derive them from the ‘I’ without a given sensuous ‘Thou’. Only through communication between man and man do the ideas arise. Not alone, but only with others, does one reach notions and reason in general.

(Feuerbach 1986: 58)

This socially mediated species knowledge is the only kind of knowledge we are capable of that is worthy of the name. This is why I believe that when we are trying to describe Feuerbach’s position, the term anthropocentric sensualism is more accurate than rationalist empiricism.

With anthropocentric sensualism, then, we are brought into contact with the only type of reality we will ever know – our reality as sensuous material beings with a set of very specific needs and desires. This is the only objectivity we can encounter – the existence, needs and limitations of our species-being. It deserves the name “realist”, because in our experience of need, we encounter the existence (or absence) of objects that we require, such as love and hunger (Feuerbach 1986: 53). In this sense, the anthropocentric sensualism of human sense-perception possesses ‘ontological, *metaphysical* significance’ (Feuerbach 1986: 53) – a kind of anthropological metaphysics, as it were. This is revealed most profoundly in the experience of love, which Feuerbach describes as ‘the true ontological proof of the existence of an object apart from our mind’ (Feuerbach 1986: 53). We can now understand more fully that the ontologicisation of finite self-transcendence that Hegel is guilty of is the failure to acknowledge this anthropological, material and communal context of our encounter with reality and nature. It is also how we can better understand Feuerbach’s restriction of

this Hegelian concept to the phenomenological domain. Hegel's error is precisely the error of confusing the fact that the knowledge of the world is mediated via our species consciousness with the belief that it is merely an object of consciousness. That is, because Hegel fails to understand that the world comes to us via the prism of our "species perspective", he jumps to the totally unwarranted conclusion that it contains, and is the projection of, consciousness itself. This is what distinguishes Feuerbach's position – anthropocentrism – with the rather Hegelian position – anthropomorphism.

Johnston believes that his anthropocentrism suffices to attribute to Feuerbach a strong sense of immanence at this stage in his thinking, which involves 'denying transcendence' (Johnston 1995: 105). By locating the persistence of finite self-transcendence, albeit truncated to the phenomenological domain, we can see evidence that Johnston's interpretation is a slight oversimplification. A role for transcendence remains, even though it is no longer grasped in terms of any "extra-human" dimension.<sup>8</sup> A useful way to describe the subtle distinction is to label Feuerbach's desire that human beings go beyond their mere individual sensuousness and unite with a wider species consciousness divested of divine/cosmic significance as *transcendence-within-immanence*.<sup>9</sup> This helps us explain why his species concept in *EOC* was criticised as being too abstract, as we will see in a moment. Feuerbach is clear enough when he pronounces that '[c]onsciousness, in the strict or proper sense, is identical with consciousness of the infinite; a limited consciousness is no consciousness; consciousness is essentially infinite in its nature' (Feuerbach 1854: 2). Furthermore, in his phenomenological understanding of the infinity of consciousness, he approaches Hegel's concept of finite self-transcendence of the individual. Consider the following passage where the individual human being distinguishes him/herself from the rest of the animal kingdom by transcending the particularity of his/her ego in cognisance of species consciousness:

It is true that the human being, as an individual, can and must – herein consists his distinction from the brute – feel and recognise himself to be limited; but he can become conscious of his limits, his finiteness, only because the perfection, the *infinity* of his species, is perceived by him, whether as an object of feeling, of conscience, or of the thinking consciousness.... It is ludicrous and even culpable error to define as finite and limited what constitutes the essence of man, the nature of the species, which is the *absolute nature of the individual*. Every being is sufficient to itself. No being can deny itself, i.e. its own nature; no being is a limited one to itself. Rather, *every being is and by itself infinite...*

(Feuerbach 1854: 7 [emphasis added])

There are clear resonances of the phenomenological application of finite self-transcendence in Feuerbach's understanding of individuality, positing an 'absolute nature of the individual' that transcends mere particularity in unity with 'the infinity of the species' with the result that a defining characteristic of individuality is

its species nature: ‘every being is an by itself infinite’. The task of every individual is to reach this unity, to realise his/her species-essence in a phenomenological dialectic (a task in which an anthropocentrically oriented science and philosophy will come to play the prominent role in Feuerbach’s later works). And so in appropriating finite self-transcendence for atheistic and naturalistic purposes, Feuerbach is endorsing the powerful Hegelian demolition of egoism, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was an important point of departure of Hegel from the Kantian system.

As we have seen in the last chapter, Hegelians (such as Robert Wallace) would object to Feuerbach’s attempt to operate finite self-transcendence within the boundaries of an immanentist–naturalist humanism, no doubt describing it as yet another exercise in spurious infinity.<sup>10</sup> How can it be applied to a concept of the species that itself is predicated on a view of it as bounded by nature and the structure of human material need? How can we describe the species as in any way “infinite” when it is grounded purely on the limitations of its natural and sensual condition? The concept must involve True Infinity (TI) if it is to be coherent and we saw that this must involve ontological transcendence and, in particular, Hegel’s subject panentheism. At this point, we can identify a tension in Feuerbach’s thought. We know from earlier in this chapter that this orthodox Hegelian insistence cannot answer the objection that TI is a powerful example of the anthropomorphic imposition of the structure of human logic about the relationship between finitude and infinity onto reality itself. A marked feature of Feuerbach’s materialism is that he thinks that it is fruitless to try to search for ultimate explanations for our existence and that of nature. We saw that this was how he could dismiss objective idealism and Absolute Spirit as the ultimate rationalisation of questions that Christian theologians have been asking since the time of Augustine. Given our sensual perspectivism (and that the only universality in thought we are capable of is that which is arrived at inter-subjectively), there are some things that we can never know. This scepticism (or, rather, epistemic humility) will remain a feature of his thinking in the later writings. In the *EOC*, it remains an undeveloped presence that co-exists rather awkwardly with the residual Hegelianism that tempts him to speak of humanity as “infinite”. And as we will see in a moment, Feuerbach himself will shortly come to the view that it is difficult to operate even with this limited application of the finite–infinite dialectic when he dispenses with such a way to conceptualise humankind.

A major implication of this rejection of objective idealism is the point made by Feuerbach that, in its hands, finite self-transcendence follows Christianity by merely reasserting egoism at an ontological level. In making this argument in the *EOC*, he is displaying his ability to identify in Christianity, despite its falseness, vital truths about the system of human needs. For it reaches its egoism only as the result of a distorted interpretation of important human needs symbolised in the Incarnation and the Trinity. We saw that one of Hegel’s criticisms of theism was that, by virtue of spurious infinity, it “absolutised” the ego by abstracting it from nature and other human beings. This is evidenced by one of Feuerbach’s key attributes of God as ‘the moral nature of man posited as the absolute being

... [setting] man's own nature before him as a separate nature' (Feuerbach 1854: 45, 46): the projection of a perfected image of the moral ego onto the divine. The immediately obvious downside of this act of moral anthropomorphism is that such perfection is not the property of fallible individual human beings. To overcome this distance, Christianity projects the human capacity for love onto the divine, thus rendering Him 'not only as a law, as a moral being, as a being of the understanding; but also as a loving, tender, even subjective human being (that is, as having sympathy with individual man)' (Feuerbach 1854: 46). This is the foundation for the act of the Incarnation where God takes pity on us to the extent of suffering with us and for our sake. For Feuerbach, this is proof of the capacity for sensuous human nature to exhibit love and compassion, for it is only when He becomes flesh that He can love and forgive our sins: 'The negation or annulling of sin is the negation of abstract moral rectitude – the positing of love, mercy, sensuous life. Not abstract beings – no! only sensuous, living beings, are merciful. Mercy is *the justice of sensuous life*' (Feuerbach 1854: 47–48 [emphasis in original]). As one would expect from a perspective that thinks of Christianity as a human inspiration, he then posits the Father and Son relation that emerges with the Incarnation as correlates of the I-Thou communitarian relation with the "I" represented by the moral law of the Father and "Thou" the compassion of the Son (Feuerbach 1854: 66). The third Person of the Trinity, for its part, is this loving relation expressed in the idea of the community (Feuerbach 1854: 66).

The Godhead, taken in its totality, is therefore fully representative of our species nature – the evolution from the despair of God as alien, to the idea of His love via the Son to the expression of that love in the need for communal relations via the Holy Spirit. And so in its totality, the Godhead is opposed to the narrow egoism of PDM, which we saw manifest itself in much Enlightenment thought. The negative of this is, of course, the Christian principle of personal salvation, which is, conversely, the affirmation of this egoism (and quite possibly the religious origin of egoistic PDM). For Feuerbach, this originates in the nationalistic egoism of Judaism, with its view of itself as a race chosen by God: 'Christianity has spiritualised the egoism of Judaism into subjectivity ... has changed the desire for earthly happiness, the goal of the Jewish religion, into the longing for heavenly bliss, which is the goal of Christianity' (Feuerbach 1854: 120). This is but the transformation of the ego of the Israeli nation into that of the individual man – both are damaging examples of the estrangement from human species nature that religion can produce. Both are products of the negative – alienating – component of theism that deny the primacy of our sensuous condition. And as the mere rationalisation of this personification and the subject panentheistic denial of any outside or limitation to the self, Absolute Spirit is the most developed philosophical expression of egoism. This is in spite of Hegel's own communitarianism, so presumably Feuerbach would feel that his logic sits rather uncomfortably with the intent of his political thought. In short, Feuerbach calls for the renunciation of theistic and idealistic transcendence, because they have functioned to turn the ego away from practical and concrete

activities that could realise core sensuous needs – freedom, comfort and protection from the ravages of nature – and towards illusory mechanisms for their realisation in the false consolations of the supernatural.

### **Tensions between transcendence and naturalism in the EOC and PPF**

One cannot help but conclude that the Feuerbach of the *EOC* and *PPF* is advocating a transcendental ethics of the human species where a new humanist secularism becomes the new religion to replace both theism and Hegelianism. Humankind achieves fulfilment, not in God or Absolute Spirit, but in an earthly community whose values are the embodiment of sensuous material needs. Christianity and Hegelianism contain these values, but their respective theological doctrines have distorted them into alienated forms. The positive and negative components of *EOC*'s analysis of the Christian faith are to be grasped in these terms.<sup>11</sup> As with Hegel, the political state is to serve as the mechanism for the realisation of the infinite, but an infinite grounded in the atheist religion of humanity (Johnston 1995: 114–115). I indicated above why there may be certain logical tensions within the Feuerbachian system between his sensualism and naturalism, on the one hand, and the persistence of the transcendent, on the other (albeit reconceived materialistically), especially in terms of the truncation (rather than outright rejection) of the concept of finite self-transcendence in the pages of the *EOC* and *PPF*. I referred to this as transcendence-within-immanence and it is the fundamental philosophical basis of Feuerbach's radical humanism in the early 1840s. Evidence of this can be seen in some important passages in *PPF* where he appears to construct his humanism in terms of a sensual universalism where traditional theistic and Hegelian normative values are realised via this new secular religion of humanity. For example, Feuerbach alludes strongly to the Hegelian take on the age-old utopianism regarding the uniqueness of the human species in terms of its universality. For Hegel, it was our status, by virtue of our intrinsic rationality, as self-transcending creatures that lifted us beyond the merely animal. Feuerbach, as we have seen, dismisses this as the persistence of dualism. We might venture to suggest that this was the failure of objective idealism to adequately resolve the problems of the Kantian categorical imperative. The only viable means of establishing a consistent non-duality was not to abandon the idea of human universality, but rather to ground it in the system of sensual needs. In other words, the endeavour to formulate utopian non-duality was not to be abandoned. Rather, the deficiencies and contradictions it suffered under objective idealism were to be overcome in a new form in sensual universalism. The senses were not to be relegated to the status of dealing with mere matters of finite existence, but in so doing were at the same time integrated with uniquely human (i.e. universal) concerns:

Man distinguishes himself from the animals not only by thinking. His whole being, rather, constitutes his distinction from the animals.... So we need not

reach beyond the realm of sensation in order to recognise man as a being ranking above the animals. Man is not a particular being, like the animals, but a universal being; he is not, then, a limited and restricted being, but rather an unlimited and free being, for universality, absoluteness, and freedom are inseparable. This freedom does not lie in a special faculty, that is, reason; this freedom and this universality extend themselves over man's total being.

(Feuerbach 1986: 69)

We have seen that this integration occurs when human beings, in their sensual experience, rise to “species consciousness” inter-subjectively in their communal relations with each other. In so doing, they attain a universal sensuousness that has for its object not just the particularities that are required for their material (biological) sustenance, but all possible objects, including and in particular the species itself. Our senses are universal senses that take all of sensuous reality as their objects. The extensiveness of human experience is revealed most aptly in our capacity for knowledge and understanding of nature in which the senses ‘elevate themselves in man to intellectual and scientific acts’ (Feuerbach 1986: 69). This is an attempt to ground, in an anthropological materialism, the belief – Hegelian in origin – that we are able to transcend our mere finite particular concerns in a sensuous universalism that is ‘the totality of human life and of the human essence’ (Feuerbach 1986: 71).

Johnston argues that naturalism plays a subordinate role to anthropologism and humanism at this stage of Feuerbach’s intellectual development (Johnston 1995: 140). By “naturalism”, he means ‘the rejection of transcendence and of supernaturalism, the recognition of secondary causes as the only causes. Nature, as the totality of objects of experience and their properties, is all there is’ (Johnston 1995: 98). Accordingly, he argues that *EOC* and *PPF* were explicitly opposed to any kind of transcendence as such and that there was a clear distinction between Hegel’s endorsement of ‘an actually transcendent Infinite’ and Feuerbach’s system that ‘admits only of finite, conditioned objects’ (Johnston 1995: 140). But we know from the principle of transcendence-within-immanence that a rejection of supernaturalism and the insistence on the primacy of secondary causes in explaining nature is not the same thing as rejecting transcendence, but merely *idealist* transcendence, such as in theism and panentheism. Max Stirner, a contemporary of Feuerbach’s and fellow associate of the Young Hegelians, identified the persistence of transcendence in the *EOC* when he penned his critique of it in 1844 entitled *The Ego and His Own* ([1844] 1910). To be sure, Feuerbach is credited with expertly exposing the human essence that lies behind the concept and attributes of God: ‘God has become man, but now man is himself the gruesome spook which he seeks to ... exorcise, to fathom, to bring to reality and to speech; man is – *spirit*’ (Stirner 1910: 36 [emphasis in original]). Feuerbach is credited with discovering this fact about God, but only to deliver humanity from His arms into the arms of a perfected image of itself. The effect is merely to transform one form of oppressive transcendent morality into

another. Stirner notes with disappointment how the most powerful attacks on religious morality have been inflicted by those, including and in particular Feuerbach, who seem to want to replace it with one of their own:

Piety has for a century received so many blows, and to hear its superhuman essence reviled as an ‘inhuman’ one so often, that one cannot feel tempted to draw the sword against it again. And yet it has almost always been moral opponents that have appeared in the arena, to assail the supreme essence in favour of – another supreme essence ... whether this is a superhuman or human one ... can make but little difference to me ... So Feuerbach instructs us that, ‘if one only *inverts* speculative philosophy, *i.e.* always makes the predicate the subject, and so makes the subject the object and principle, one has the undraped truth, pure and clean. Herewith, to be sure, we lose the narrow religious standpoint, lose the *God*, who from this standpoint is subject; but we take in exchange for it the other side of the religious standpoint, the *moral* standpoint’.

(Stirner 1910: 39)

Johnston defends Feuerbach by dismissing the Stirner critique as a caricature of his actual position in *EOC* (Johnston 1995: 148). It is, he argues, a misrepresentation of Feuerbach’s species concept to see it as simply an inversion of the Christian concept of God, so that “humanity” is posited as transcendent of historical finite human beings in the same way God is imagined to be in Christian discourse. Johnston quite rightly points out that such a representation is indeed unfair on Feuerbach. But if Stirner is guilty of anything, it is not that he identifies transcendence operating within the species concept, but that he identifies the wrong type. This is why he erroneously ends up thinking that it is an abstraction on par with the God-concept of theism. But if it is possible to see the species concept in terms of a phenomenological interpretation of finite self-transcendence, despite the fact that the panentheistic origins were probably not explicitly in Feuerbach’s mind at the time, then it is perfectly valid to see it as an inversion of the God-concept – in this case, Hegel’s subject panentheism.<sup>12</sup> In defence of his thesis that there is an essential continuity between *EOC* and the later works, Johnston was well aware that the context of the former’s polemic was Feuerbach’s desire to undermine the ontological foundations of Christianity of which Hegel’s logic was its ultimate rationalisation. The projection theory that we have seen inform his humanist critique of that rationalisation should be seen, Johnston tells us, in that context. Unfortunately, he repeats the common error – as we have seen in the last chapter – of defining Absolute Spirit in terms of spurious infinity. In fact, he cites Charles Taylor’s “vehicle” metaphor as a helpful way to grasp the humanity–God relation in Hegelian metaphysics (Johnston 1995: 50). He rejects the pantheistic and atheistic–humanistic interpretation of Absolute Spirit and instead argues that ‘Hegel follows traditional Christianity insofar as man remains the often unwitting instrument of a larger agency ... it remains the case that the purposes which individuals serve are neither their own,

not in any other sense “human”’ (Johnston 1995: 21). This is the abstract, transcendent view of God that we saw was a problematic interpretation of Hegel’s onto-theology. It seems that Johnston’s failure to grasp the nuances of Hegel’s concept of God is reflected in a similar failure to grasp those of Feuerbach’s species concept at this stage in his intellectual development. The result is that he confuses Feuerbach’s immanentisation of Absolute Spirit with a rejection of transcendence as such.

Johnston quite correctly argues that when considering concepts such as the theistic concept of God, projections and man’s reification and idealisation of his own essence, we must remember that Feuerbach is using the genetico-critical method (Johnston 1995: 149). So, for example, Feuerbach’s treatment of “love” is formulated quite independently of any Christian experience of it ‘on the basis of an ontology that recognises no transcendence in our phenomenal experience, and a naturalism that stresses our social or species-character’ (Johnston 1995: 150). But I have argued that the genetico-critical method operates within the ontology of transcendence-within-immanence of the *EOC* period. As a result, love remains a powerful mechanism, whereby the finite individual locates *within his or her sensual experience* the basis for critical reflection on that experience, which points to something that transcends the immediacy of that condition. Johnston seems to think that the insistence that ‘there are no legitimate ends for man higher than the proper ordering of his social relations’ (Johnston 1995: 150) is enough to prove that Feuerbach was steadfastly opposed to the principle of transcendence at this stage of his thinking. This not only fails to appreciate that there is more than one way to conceptualise transcendence than to imagine the transcendent as an abstract “other”, but also that there are echoes of the most logically robust conceptualisation in the materialist appropriation of Hegel’s phenomenology, which produces the genetico-critical method. Consequently, there is no reason to suppose that a focus on a ‘rational, critical comprehension, utilisation and regulation’ (Johnston 1995: 151) of the concrete context of human social and natural interactions and the retention of a dimension of the transcendent are irreconcilable.

Van A. Harvey, for his part, also appears to work with a similarly deficient grasp of the Hegel that Feuerbach “inverts”. What is distinctive however is that he argues that the latter’s objectification of the species idea was a feature of only *EOC* and that *PPF* represented a new stage in Feuerbach’s intellectual development that will ‘forsake the abstractions of Hegel’s philosophy and concern itself with the embodied human individual and its concrete feelings and needs’ (Harvey 1997: 136). We have seen that even if we look past the fact that it was published in the same year (1843) as the second edition of *EOC*, there is still evidence that species universalism is a prominent feature of *PPF*’s thesis. Despite this oversight, Harvey’s analysis of *EOC*, if not quite so much *PPF*, is important. He argues that one of its main failings is that it suffers from Feuerbach’s concern with the Hegelian preoccupation with stressing the unique capacity for human beings to be conscious of the unlimited nature of their consciousness itself (Harvey 1997: 36–37) – what we have just seen is the

infinity of species consciousness. As a result, the basic principle of naturalism – the idea of a pre-existent nature from which consciousness emerges and which limits it – is lost or, rather, diminished. The constituent elements of sensuous consciousness – feeling, reason and need – that, as we have seen above, are emergent from nature are de-coupled from these moorings and become too closely linked to Hegelian phenomenology. In such a climate, there is the real danger that sensuousness will lose its Feuerbachian – materialist – intention of indicating the determinateness and primacy of nature and instead collapse into a Hegelian – idealist – function as the product of consciousness' externality. This utilisation of phenomenology for the services of anthropologism may suffice to provide an atheistic explanation for God – that He is the perfect projection of our infinite species consciousness, the act of consciousness' self-differentiation – but it is one that has more to do with objective idealism than with materialism or naturalism, despite the obvious logical difficulties with such an association.<sup>13</sup>

Harvey calls these two competing aspects – Hegelian and naturalist – the dominant and subordinate strands, respectively, of his thought (Harvey 1997: 49–50). I find this classification rather problematic for the reasons just given. Rather than identifying these aspects of the system as “strands”, it might be more accurate to label them “tensions”. Nevertheless, what is particularly interesting about the “subordinate” strand are the implications for the future of religious consciousness of the embeddedness of the I–Thou relation. This is an important theme that I wish to develop over the remainder of this chapter as we move to consider the emergence of naturalism to prominence in the later works. If the relation is posited as a necessary feature of our embeddedness in nature (rather than the first act in the self-differentiation of consciousness), then we are thrust into a state of dependence on a natural world that is indifferent to our needs, desires and very existence. An important feature of *EOR* and *LOER* that marks Feuerbach out as an important critic of meta-utopia is that this condition is permanent; with the passing of all forms of transcendence there is no hope of any escape from this original state in which humans find themselves. Not only is this, as we will see, a powerful contribution to the repudiation of meta-utopianism, it is also a powerful contribution to immanent post-secularism. That is, under the terms of the now-dominant naturalism, religious consciousness is seen as the rationalisation of our primitive rebellion against our existentialist nature (rather than merely the Hegelian-inspired dialectic of consciousness' self-differentiation). God comes to personify, not our species consciousness, but our desire to control nature (symbolically represented in the Immaculate Conception, Jesus' miracles and triumph over death) and even transcend it. But since, in these later works, Feuerbach rejects transcendence of any kind, it must follow that he denies any hope that we can escape these conditions. Religion, in a sense, provides an important function for many people – the false consolation in the teeth of a world utterly indifferent to humanity's well-being. It becomes a permanent feature of the human condition, because it is an inevitable by-product of the human condition grasped naturalistically. Anthropomorphism is written into

I-Thou relations as its key by-product. Feuerbach is one of the most famous critics of religion in the history of philosophy and his writings are seen as important (if limited) weapons in the cause of those who look forward to a post-religious awakening. This reputation is deserved only in relation to his *EOC/PPF* period. In the later works in general and *EOR/LOER* in particular, Feuerbach really comes into his own as a powerful and distinctive thinker who stands apart from Hegel and formulates ideas about the human–nature relation independently of Marx and Engels that would become foundational for historical materialism.. As we will now see, the paradox is that in leaving Hegelian methodology behind in his later works – and we have seen how important a religious thinker Hegel was – and embracing a consistent naturalism, Feuerbach qualifies as a post-secularist.

### Beyond transcendence: the naturalism and empirical realism of the later Feuerbach

I mentioned above that in *EOC/PPF* phase of his thought, the phenomenological context in which finite self-transcendence operated – transcendence-within-immanence – produced a logical tension (and possible incoherence from the perspective of TI) between Feuerbach's humanism and sensual naturalism. It is because of the residual Hegelianism at work in these books that he was made vulnerable to attacks from others within the Left Hegelian School – most notably Marx and Engels – that his system was, in actual fact, a watered-down materialism that formulated an abstract species-ontology. The resolution of the tension between these parts of his thought in the post-1843 period up until his death in 1872 – what I am going to call his post-Hegelian phase – enabled him to escape these difficulties, because he abandoned humanist universalism. Instead, the perspectivism, which we have just seen was left largely undeveloped in these earlier works, came to dominate and characterise his humanism. Its dominance can be seen in the final dissolution of all traces of dualism, which separates human rationality from immediate sensuousness. The former was more closely associated with the species universalism in the earlier works than the latter, but in *EOR/LOER* there is no sense in which rationality contained a transcendent aspect. It is a naturalism that is at last devoid of all traces of transcendence, be it in the form of Hegelian Absolute Spirit or Feuerbach's own species universalism.

In *EOR/LOER*, the underdeveloped concept of anthropocentrism that informed the species concept in the earlier works, along with the genetico-criticism that underpins it, comes to primacy. We will recall that this is the claim that our capacity to know anything about the world around us rests on our system of sensuous needs and desires. Our starting position is the existence of nature from which we have emerged and which provides us with these needs. Since all being is sensuous being, it follows that knowledge is restricted to species perspectivism. Nature is therefore only sensuous nature, the sum total of all material objects capable of sensuous apprehension:

By nature I mean the total of all sensuous forces, things and beings which man distinguishes from himself as other than human; in general.... Or in practical terms: nature is everything which man, notwithstanding the supernaturalist whisperings of theistic faith, experiences directly and sensuously as the ground and substance of his life. Nature is light, electricity, magnetism, air, water, fire, earth, animals, plants; nature is man, insofar as he is a being who acts instinctively and unconsciously – and I claim nothing more; there is nothing mystical, nothing nebulous, nothing theological in my use of the word. In my use of the word I appeal to the senses.... [N]ature, say I, is every visible thing that is not the product of human hand or human thought ... nature is the being, or the sum of beings and things, whose manifestations, expressions, or effects, in which its existence and essence consist and are revealed, have their ground not in thoughts or purposes or acts of will, but in astronomical or cosmic, mechanical, chemical, physical, physiological, or organic forces or causes.

(Feuerbach 1967: 90–91)

Thus, speculating about that which lies beyond sensuous nature (e.g. “first causes”) is fruitless, because

I owe my existence only to a nature of the kind in which I live, the nature with which my nature is compatible ... I am an earthly being ... and this, as the philosophers say, constitutes my substance, my fundamental being.

(Feuerbach 1967: 92)

What enables Feuerbach to claim that, despite being constrained by the system of needs and desires that nature produces in us, we are emergent from it is not that there is something transcendent about us that lifts us outside the boundaries of our finite existences, even within the confines of materialism (i.e. the materialist transcendence of *EOC*). Rather, it is our subjective, anthropocentric condition that produces our tendency to differentiate ourselves from nature.<sup>14</sup> This tendency is essentially what he is referring to when he talks about culture, politics and history in the later works. In *EOC* and other works from this period, the dominant narrative is that they are evidence of our species universalism. In *LOER*, the subordinate narrative of *EOC* – that they are merely the mechanisms of our anthropocentric self-reflection on our finiteness – comes to primacy. That is, they do not provide the means of going beyond our finiteness. They are entirely subjective and fallible reflections on our cognisance of the limitations of our natural being.

In the next chapter, we will see that these insights are surprisingly close to the historical materialism that Marx and Engels were developing around the same time. This compatibility of position will be the key to my argument that historical materialism leaves no room for transcendence of any type and attempts to marry the two reaches their fullest expression in the creative materialism of Ernst Bloch. According to the latter, it is precisely by virtue of the uniquely

human capacity for culture, politics, history and above all the character of our labour that allows for trans-human and trans-utopian possibilities. In the language of a materialistic application of PMR, as we will see, it is the means by which, via the elimination of class society (demi-reality), we reacquaint ourselves with our ground-state in communism. Feuerbach, however (echoed independently by Marx and Engels of the mid-1840s), is saying that a sense of our own social agency or the identification of “laws” of historical development cannot emancipate us from the fact that we are merely products of natural processes just like any other biological organism. This is why anthropocentric self-reflection is a purely subjective phenomenon. There is no basis – other than our own misapprehension of our place in nature – to imagine that there is anything much to distinguish us fundamentally from the rest of the animal kingdom. And so if we were to understand Feuerbach using the resources of CR and PMR, we would see that emergence of trans-humanism from nature is not a real property of humankind. It is not evidence of a “ground-state” or a dimension of our material species-being, but is merely perspectivist. While he would think it was certainly true that we emerge from natural processes, it is a delusory exaggeration of our status as intelligent primates to extrapolate from this that any kind of transcendence – actual or potential, idealist or materialist – is an intrinsic part of our being. That is, we “emerge” in the same way as any other life form. It would be a mistake to conclude from the fact that we have the unique capacity for self-reflection in our natural condition that this is evidence of anything “transcendent” about us. Feuerbach would reject claims that trans-human emergence is objectively identifiable, because it is merely a psychological phenomenon of species perspectivism.

The final renunciation of Hegelian transcendence is not, however, at the expense of what we identified as the positive content of Feuerbach’s appraisal of religion in *EOC*. The illusory status of transcendence does not mean that important truths about the real relationship between humanity and nature are not still evident within it. The task in *EOR/LOER* is to retrieve the real relationship from its religious distortions, just as it was in *EOC*. Accordingly, the theory of projection developed in the latter work is also evident in the former, but divested of its Hegelian core. Having dispensed with the concept of the infinity of the human species, projection is no longer about the objectification of our species consciousness. It is now about the interconnection between two poles of our existence as a purely finite species: our status as emergent from nature and our reflections on the dependency that we have on it, which includes our fascination with it, as well as the anxieties and desires that are produced (Harvey 1997: 162). For the later Feuerbach, religious projection occurs when we misunderstand or even forget our dependence on nature and develop transcendent or abstract beliefs as a result.<sup>15</sup> As he tells us:

[I]t is in nature that we live, breathe, and are; nature encompasses man on every side; take away nature and man ceases to exist; he subsists through nature and is dependent on nature in all his activities. It is no more possible

to cut off man from nature than to cut off the eye from light, the lungs from air, the stomach from food; he is no more self-sufficient than they.

(Feuerbach 1967: 79)

This is the basis of what I call his *sensuously mediated dependency*, which he accordingly defines as '*the known or felt need for an object*' (Feuerbach 1967: 81 [emphasis in original]). The errors of transcendence emerge when we fail to grasp that this dependency is fundamental to our very human essence: 'only where man cannot explain his own being by nature that he goes beyond nature' (Feuerbach 1967: 84). These errors also emerge when we forget that all our knowledge is perspectivist. My sensuously mediated dependency produces anthropocentrism. Human beings emerge from natural processes on the Earth, which will always constrain and shape the way that we think about things. Alluding to the futility of the search for primary causes to the world, Feuerbach contends that

the earth and the position it occupies in the universe also determine the way in which I think and feel ... I see things in the light and measure of the earth ... even though the earth too has an origin, I owe my origin to it alone, to its origin; for the existence of the earth is the sole ground of human existence, its being the sole ground of human being.

(Feuerbach 1967: 93)

We see, therefore, the anthropocentric sensualism that existed in tension with the Hegelian-inspired concept of species consciousness in the earlier works comes into dominant position here: sensuousness gives us reason enough to believe that there is a real world outside of our experiences that is the cause of our experiences.<sup>16</sup> But we saw above in our discussion of *PPF* that the connection with the world is mediated via the uniquely human character of our dependency, which can sometimes lead us astray to misunderstand the nature of this connection (especially those that involve religious delusions). This means that we must factor into sense experience the crucial element of *critique*. In so uniting the sensuous with the critical faculties, Feuerbach is adopting a monist position where rationality is inextricably bound up with sense experience or, as he puts it, 'sensuousness is nothing other than the true unity, a unity that is not cogitated or constructed but really exists, between matter and spirit; thus it is in my work tantamount to reality' (Feuerbach 1967: 12). And so that which renders sensualism anthropocentric is not a species consciousness to which we are transcendentally connected and which mediates our knowledge of nature and our place in it. Rather, it is our finite natural condition itself that provides the absolute foundation of our humanity. This fact is the limit of our knowledge of "objectivity". In fact, it is the only "reality" we can ever know. What is different from *PPF/EOC* is that there is nothing infinite about our anthropocentric knowledge with the demise of our species consciousness. It is instead constrained by the limitations of our finite system of needs.

In a moment, I will criticise the later Feuerbach's realism from a CR perspective, particularly using TR. But for now, I think some examination of *EOR/LOER* is required to justify the claim that I am making regarding Feuerbach's philosophical trajectory away from an infinite and towards a finite conception of the species that is materialistically grounded. We can locate a strongly phenomenological thrust to his materialism here – recall the assertion above that nature is only “sensuous nature” – which leaves him open to the accusation that he is a subjectivist. Nevertheless, there is evidence that he wishes to construct his phenomenology on realist foundations that are more secure than simply the assertion of belief in primary causes to human life. What is crucial here, as Wartofsky has pointed out, is the difference from *EOC* in the classification of the I–Thou relation.<sup>17</sup> We recall that in the latter text, it took the form of the relation between the sensuous individual and the infinite species. But in *EOR*, the recognition of the “other” by the individual takes the form not of a simple recognition of other people as bearers of consciousness; rather nature assumes the form of sheer otherness and so becomes the “Thou” (Wartofsky 1977: 391). What Feuerbach is essentially doing here is rethinking his starting point. When the species consciousness enjoyed explanatory primacy, the task was to determine how we get from the facts of consciousness – the “I” of the ego – to objective material reality. It was not external nature as such that was the object, but rather human nature. But with the eclipse of species universalism, nature becomes the object and so the question is how we get from objective material reality – the sheer otherness that is the “Thou” – to consciousness. It is here – when freed from its tense co-existence as a subordinate strand in *EOC/PPF* – that the full implications of Feuerbach's sensual realism (if we may call it that) is explained, because it is only here that we can finally speak of Feuerbach trying to assert the primacy of matter over thought. As we will now see, he is less than successful in this endeavour.

The attempt to strengthen his realist credentials was not seen by Feuerbach as creating a new tension in his thought – this time between anthropological sensualism and objectivity – because our access to knowledge about the latter may still be possible via a particular type of heightened sensualism – namely, science. Couched, as it almost always is, in a critique of the epistemological status of theology, Feuerbach seems to be suggesting that those elusive “natural causes” that give rise to human life might be accessible to our sensibility after all. As he argues in *LOER*:

In the last lecture I offered a few hints as to how natural phenomena ... may be explained in physical, or natural terms. I am well aware that these few superficial remarks do not explain the origin and nature of organic life. We are far from the stage of scientific development that will enable us to solve this problem.... And though there are numerous phenomena in nature whose physical, natural ground we have not yet discovered, it is absurd to resort to theology for that reason. What we do not know, posterity will find out.

(Feuerbach 1967: 131, 134)

But emphasising the primacy of matter over thought does not mean Feuerbach is opting for a perfunctory mechanistic materialism, according to which consciousness is merely self-active matter. We should not forget that conscious reflections on our dependence on nature are inextricably perspectivist. There are no echoes of Hobbes in the later Feuerbach. Nor does he abandon his disdain for Cartesian duality from his earlier works. Perhaps in this sense we might locate the persistence of Hegel (or at least the influence of German idealism) after all that survives the passing of his species universalism, if only in Feuerbach's rejection of an eliminative or reductionist monism. Epistemological questions cannot escape the facts of our anthropological conditioning. The relationship between our conscious reflections on the material conditions that gave rise to consciousness, the relationship between sensation and thought, knowledge and reality are always mediated by our relations of dependency and need. Anthropological sensualism is the unity of human consciousness with the sense experience of a real (i.e. independent) nature.

The key interface between thought and nature is thinking activity where nature is humanised in the sense that real natural objects are experienced from the perspective of human species' needs. Science has been the most effective means of achieving this goal, Feuerbach tells us. The external object only becomes an object for our knowledge once it becomes a sensual object or, as Wartofsky has summarised the point, '[o]bjectivity is not "there", it is acquired; but by a being whose essence is this very acquisition itself, its life practice, its sensibility therefore' (Wartofsky 1977: 405). In accordance with anthropological sensualism, the external world is humanised by appropriating it through the act of making it an object of our thinking and sensing activity. It is only under these conditions that Feuerbach thinks it becomes an "object" for us at all. As dependent creatures, this activity – this construction of objectivity – defines us as human. There is therefore an identity of object and subject, of body and mind that is achieved not reductively (either mind to body or body to mind), but via the totality of sensual praxis or, as Wartofsky puts it, 'the identity, or unity, is the totality itself, as a functional or organic one, that is, as an activity of living, thinking, feeling, willing' (Wartofsky 1977: 408–409). In the next chapter, this will be contrasted with Marx's development of anthropological sensualism to include concrete labour activity. Marx and Engels proceed from the naturalism of the later Feuerbach to formulate their historical materialist position distinct from the latter's grasping of activity as merely thinking, rather than productive (labour) activity as such.

What Feuerbach appears to be doing here by positing this relation of human consciousness with the organic world is identifying a qualitatively distinct domain of nature made possible by the uniqueness of human sensibility – the irreducible totality that renders sensibility at once thinking activity. And so what seems to distinguish our mode of sensibility from the rest of the animal kingdom is the distinction between the totality of body and mind that is *empirical sensuous reality*, on the one hand, and body and mind taken as opposites, which are thus seen as *abstractions*, on the other. This is what, ultimately, Feuerbach takes

to be real, not independent nature in and of itself that is the condition of the possibility of our existence and upon which we are dependent, but, rather, our reflection/understanding of it via sensibility.<sup>18</sup> As he tells us in *LOER*: ‘In my work sensuousness is nothing other than the true unity, a unity that is not cogitated or constructed but really exists, between matter and spirit; thus in my work it is tantamount to reality’ (Feuerbach 1967: 12). There is a distinction here between sensuous reality (that is, the world of direct sense experience of matter) and our reflections on, and understanding of, it (i.e. consciousness or “spirit”). Johnston, in his defence of Feuerbach, makes a similar point when he says that ‘[o]ur connection with reality depends upon that which connects consciousness with what is independent of, or external to, consciousness: namely our senses’ (Johnston 1995: 284). The act of understanding is presumably the means whereby sensuousness is brought into the terrain of human anthropocentrism. The distinction between these two sides of the unity is the crucial means whereby Feuerbach aims to sustain his realism, since, as Johnston argues, ‘the reality of the world is nonetheless independent of that understanding, it stands outside the anthropocentric circle’ (Johnston 1995: 284). Sense experience is thus pre-conscious and so part of body, rather than mind. Ultimately, the epistemological robustness – not least against the many distorted readings that identify a “passive unreflective materialism” – of Feuerbach’s naturalism and materialism rests on this distinction.

Johnston argues that there are clear ramifications for transcendence in all of this. He says as much when he concludes that ‘[i]f one rejects transcendence, all reality must be encountered through experience, and one must accept the ontological priority of the world given through experience’ (Johnston 1995: 284). The logic of Johnston’s argument here is that in rejecting God and theology, Feuerbach is rejecting transcendence and so embracing materialism and naturalism. However, the species concept that replaces the God-concept will remain vulnerable to accusations that it is a lifeless abstraction (as we have seen), unless it is grounded in an anthropological–sensualist unity that begins with raw sense-data and moves to conscious reflection on it based on human dependency. This, in turn, requires Feuerbach to embrace empirical realism, because he thinks that it is the only way of ensuring the ontological priority of materialism over idealism.

First of all, let us put aside my criticisms of Johnston’s questionable practice (in places within his book) of conflating theology and belief in God with transcendence (as I have already dealt with this above). But given that Feuerbach does reject idealist modes of thought (which is not at all the same thing as rejecting transcendence) the importance of building his post-*EOC* humanism on solid realist materialist foundations is obvious. Unfortunately, neither his nor Johnston’s attempts to do so are particularly persuasive. From a CR perspective, it is the fact that empirical sensuous activity is based on a purely sensualist conception of independent reality that raises problems, because it is based on a false distinction between sensuous experience itself (which is posited as part of independent reality) and our reflections on it (which is anthropocentric). But from

our discussion on TR, we know that there is no reason to believe that reality is exhausted by sensibility. To say that humans experience the world sensually is one thing. To then say that this mode of experience is exhaustive of reality itself is quite another. Now, I am not saying that Feuerbach fails to distinguish experience from reality, because he thinks that reality is simply that which is the object of human experience. We know from his theory of dependency that this anthropological empirical realism allows for the possibility of the existence of things that are not, or have not been, objects of human experience. If my reading of Feuerbach is correct, then the gap between positing an extra-human domain of nature and the theory that what is real is the anthropological–sensuous unity of practical activity is filled by saying that reality is that which is independent of us, but which is, in principle, capable of being grasped sensually. It is that which is capable of being brought into the orbit of anthropological sensualism. From our discussion of depth realism in the section on TR in [Chapter 1](#) – the distinction between the empirical, the actual and the real – we could conclude that Feuerbach belongs to the class of empirical realists (the vast majority), who admit the existence of what critical realists call “actuality” – the domain of empirical events that does not have to have been directly experienced by human beings to count as part of reality.

From a materialist CR perspective, we may laud Feuerbach for at least attempting to re-vindicate the primacy of matter by asserting the primacy of pre-reflective sensuousness. As we have seen, establishing such primacy is a vital move in his final departure from Hegelianism. There is evidence here, I think, of a clumsy negotiation towards what under TR terminology we would call the existence of, and distinction between, intransitive and transitive dimensions. But we know from our discussion in [Chapter 1](#) that this is not good enough. It is common for empiricists to acknowledge actuality – and hence intransitivity as such – but the epistemic fallacy occurs when perceived empirical regularities gleaned from sense experience are simply taken as constitutive of nature. It will be recalled that this error usually occurs when scientific practice – Feuerbach’s supreme form of sense experience – is taken to constitute what Bhaskar calls “Open Systems”. I will refrain from rehearsing the argument again here. Suffice to say that *transfactuality* is the crucial missing component, whereby ‘an ontological distinction between (scientific) causal laws and patterns of events’ (Bhaskar 1978: 12; 1998: 10) is drawn. Feuerbach’s recourse to science as enhanced sensualism really gives him (and Johnston) away here. To elevate science to this status strongly implies a presumption that the constant conjunction of events that it is best equipped to identify and understand is, indeed, a feature of the real world. The conflation of sensuousness with independent reality, therefore, is simply a case of empiricistic subjectivism. It is not that non-scientific modes of sensualism (such as religion or politics) are deficient in comparison with scientific sensualism (as Feuerbach claims they are, as we will see in a moment) that is the cause of the intransitivity–transitivity indistinctiveness, but rather the presumption that reality consists primarily of sequences of events.

The problem for “enhanced” sensualism here is that it also suffers from this subjectivistic error. It is not the concrete appropriation of nature via sensual activity as such that is problematic for realism. As I have argued elsewhere (Agar 2006) and as we will see in the next chapter when we look at how Marx goes beyond mere anthropocentric sensualism to include generic labour activity as such, to define reality in terms of the totality of concrete activity is not particularly problematic from a CR perspective or, at least, it should not be. It is the definition entirely in terms of sensualism that puts Feuerbach into some difficulty. It seems that simply heightening the epistemological status of science does not suffice to resolve the tension between his anthropocentrism and the materialist ontologism that he still wishes to preserve, because science continues to rest on empirical realist presumptions. The consequence of all of this is that Feuerbach fails to adequately distinguish material reality from the ways that we go about bringing it into our universe of understanding. He fails in one of his most important objectives in the later works – establishing the primacy of independent materiality over consciousness. In such conditions of epistemological deficiency, it is not clear how the critical component of his sensualism can work coherently.

### **The later Feuerbach’s immanent utopianism and post-secularism: the final rejection of transcendence**

Despite the enhanced sensualism of science failing to convince on the matter of Feuerbach’s realist credentials, it is more successful in helping us identify an immanent utopian thread in the later works. The *EOR* and *LOER* offers us hope of improving the human condition through an understanding of nature – a continuing, immanent, utopian commitment that survives the demise of the trans-humanist concept of the infinite species. But we must remember that the trans-humanism has, indeed, been expelled from Feuerbach’s anthropologism. The purpose of establishing the primacy of sensualism within the anthropocentric circle was, despite its deficiencies, to show that we cannot in any sense transcend the immediacy of our material dependency on nature. Accordingly, projection is the process of estrangement from the understanding of this process where we try to emancipate ourselves from nature via transcendence, anthropomorphism and the like. In making this point, Feuerbach becomes an important critic of trans-humanism, because he is not just pointing the finger of criticism at religious causes of transcendent thought, but at secular versions as well. It is not just theology that encourages projection. History is also now seen as gradually developing social and political doctrines that encourage estrangement. Why Feuerbach thinks that science can be ranked as a form of enhanced sensualism is that it has, by its ability to deliver an ever-increasing improvement to the human condition, proven itself throughout history to be much more able to immunise itself from the dangers of projection. While social and political theorists have often joined theologians in losing focus on the natural grounding of human experience, the natural sciences, by virtue of their superior position on the “scale” of sensuousness, have proven more resolute. The obvious weakness here

has already been noted above: that despite his effort to avoid lapsing into a perfunctory empiricism, his concept of anthropocentric sensualism does not seem to have eradicated a certain naïvety on epistemological matters. The idea of an enhanced sensualism leads him to the unwarranted presumption that neutrality is possible in the sciences just as it failed to equip him with the means to achieve a subject–object distinction.

If we note this weakness, as we did above, it should not be a reason to ignore his message about what he regards as the dangers of transcendence. Feuerbach seems close to believing what Steve Fuller has recently identified as the typical justification provided by some atheists for why human beings have an innate attraction to the pursuit of scientific knowledge. He distinguishes between two types of atheism – one trans-humanist and the other not. One is called *Atheism* (capital ‘A’) and the other *atheism*. The latter is the result of the Enlightenment appropriation of theological rationality – the attempt to ‘recast theology for scientific purposes’ (Fuller 2010: 64), which has resulted in secular humanism, among whose principal adherents, Fuller argues, are Enlightenment Deism, Comtean ‘post-Catholic positivist religion’ (Fuller 2010: 63) and even Hegelian and Feuerbachian humanism. As such, ‘atheism . . . retains all the key metaphysical assumptions of monotheism – including eschatology, soteriology, and theodicy’ (Fuller 2010: 63). *Atheists*, on the other hand, ‘give up the theological game entirely; they do not continue trying to draw the rational wheat from the superstitious chaff of religion’ (Fuller 2010: 63). The kind of atheism the Enlightenment embraces is one infused with a ‘crypto-theological’ (Fuller 2010: 66) zeal that humanity has within its grasp a complete understanding of reality against which our “progress” as a species can be measured. There is a distinctly utopian thread that energises the insistence that science alone can provide the answers to humanity’s most pressing concerns. Accordingly, science is defined as ‘a long-term intergenerational project that aspires to a comprehensive understanding of all of reality, in relation to which “progress” can be measured’ (Fuller 2010: 69). It provides a “God’s Eye” view of things that promises us what formerly only religion could – emancipation from determination by the finite conditions of our existence, a scientific route to trans-humanism. Of course, new atheists such as Richard Dawkins (and presumably his intellectual “humanist” predecessors from the Enlightenment) would deny any such crypto-theology and instead locate the attraction of science in the absence of any legitimate divine warrant or encouragement to study and master nature in its instrumental utility in maximising our survival chances as a species. The scientific desire to conquer disease and famine and the technological advances in medicine and agriculture (for example) that have resulted can be explained exclusively in these terms – the maximisation of our selective advantage. But Fuller contends that to think in these terms is not strictly Darwinian and instead harbours an urge that is suspiciously close to a kind of scientistic trans-humanism. Darwin’s own opinion suggests a much greater scepticism regarding the potential of appropriating natural selection for humanitarian purposes. As he lost touch with his early Christian roots, Darwin increasingly came to espouse the view that there was nothing particularly

distinctive about humanity in natural history. That is, he began to see humans as ‘just one amongst many animal species destined for extinction’ (Fuller 2010: 71), which is what Fuller means by *Atheism* – a form of non-belief that was shorn of utopian, humanistic, ‘crypto-theist[ic]’ (Fuller 2010: 76) origins during the Enlightenment. Accordingly, it is *Atheism* that removes the ‘Abrahamic scaffolding of secular humanism … in pursuit of a consistently Darwinian ethic’ (Fuller 2010: 74) – an ethic that ‘appreciates the full measure of human self-restraint that would be demanded were we to live consistently Darwinian lives’ (Fuller 2010: 73).<sup>19</sup>

The context of Fuller’s paper is therefore the attempt to discredit the Darwinian credentials of new atheism by arguing that it embraces a trans-humanist immanent utopia in the form of crypto-theology. New atheism (and presumably Feuerbachianism, as Fuller understands it) is therefore not committed to the view of the purpose of science provided by a consistent evolutionary logic, but rather to one that has theological resonances. While this is a worthwhile enterprise, I think he puts Feuerbach in the wrong camp. We have seen that the accusation of formulating a trans-humanist theory from within an immanent utopian framework (transcendence-within-immanence) could be levelled at the earlier Feuerbach. But trans-humanism is hardly a feature of the later writings. As is so common among those who have taken the infinite species concept as Feuerbach’s final word on any philosophical matter of interest, there is the presumption that he belongs to the camp of Enlightenment humanism. But as the later writings have shown us, a commitment to progress should not necessarily be equated with crypto-theology. While Fuller’s argument against new atheism and scientism is worthwhile, his misreading of Feuerbach<sup>20</sup> is just one example of why a re-engagement with the latter’s philosophy that does justice to the nuances of its development away from transcendence is so overdue.

We should not mistake Feuerbach’s admonishment of theology, but rather his enthusiasm for progress for an endorsement of scientific crypto-theology. Remember that the insistence on the permanence of the otherness of nature pervades his later writings. There is no question of him endorsing any kind of trans-humanism, scientific or otherwise. Ample evidence for such disdain can be seen in his rejection of historical laws that have transcendent implications. His rejection of political theologies that have included strongly historicist dimensions (and I think he may have Hegel in mind in particular) can be seen in the following passage from *LOER*:

In all other fields man progresses; in religious matters he remains stone-blind, stone-deaf and rooted to the spot. Religious institutions, customs and articles of faith continue to be held sacred even when they stand in the most glaring contradiction to man’s more advanced reason and ennobled feelings … our task today is to do away with this loathsome and disastrous contradiction. Its elimination is the indispensable condition for the rebirth of mankind … without it, all political and social reforms are meaningless and futile.

(Feuerbach 1967: 216–217)

There is no trace here of the idea of a trans-humanist teleology or eschatology – such as that of the Spirit's progression towards self-consciousness – and nor is there any scope for a materialist re-emergence of an extra-human teleology (which I will call *infinite-teleology* in the next chapter) in Feuerbach's anti-religious polemic. There is only the idea of scientific, social and political progress measured in terms, not of emancipation from finitude, but in terms of, first, recognising our state of dependency on an indifferent and insurmountable nature and, second, taking realistic steps to mitigate its worst effects.

Of course, the extent to which Feuerbach can convincingly construct an alternative to trans-humanist atheism hinges very much on his ability to sustain the distinction between anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. Remember that secular humanism is, to use Fuller's useful phrase, "crypto-theological" in retaining a secularised "God's Eye" view of the relationship between nature and humanity. We have seen that one of the effects of the latter is to impose human purposefulness onto nature, meaning that the structure of our logical grasp of things is taken to be constitutive of objectivity. The problem for Feuerbach is, as we have just seen, that conceptualising anthropocentrism in terms of a material reality that is conflated with sensualism does not take us very far in insulating against such unwarranted impositions. The epistemic fallacy that we have just seen feature so prominently in his later epistemology is itself in danger of straying into the terrain of anthropomorphism. An anthropocentrism that reflects a more depth realist approach (which takes into account the transfactual dimension to nature) might be a more promising route to the kind of materialism he aspires to, as I have implied above. Nevertheless, the elimination of transcendence from his theory of anthropocentric humanity present in his later works is itself an important contribution to immanent utopian thought. The idea that the conditions of our finitude are exhaustive of the human condition is the crucial point as it is the means of our escape from anthropomorphic delusions about our relation to nature. Johnston usefully captures the thrust of what Feuerbach means when he says of anthropocentrism that it still finds room for transcendence: 'the world is yet an enchanted realm, a world that exists *for* (and also *against*) man, a nature in which there is Providence that turns (or can be turned) to the affairs of humans' (Johnston 1995: 280 [emphasis in original]). I have noted in my discussion of Feuerbach prior to the *EOR/LOER* that this is a criticism that can be levelled at him at this stage of his development and that it is what I called transcendence-within-immanence. This is an accusation that Johnston would probably deny, because he seems to think that once Feuerbach loses patience with religion after *TDI*, this is enough to qualify him as a thinker that is intolerant of transcendence. I have shown above that this is not a justifiable position to hold. Nevertheless, a debate on the issue of the persistence of transcendence in some of Feuerbach's books is less important than the observation of a stage in his intellectual maturation where it has been expunged. Once it has, the world then loses its enchantment, 'it exists with or without him [man], and it is only human agency, individually or collectively, that intentionally addresses the affairs of humans' (Johnston 1995: 280–281). At this stage, humans have

become what Johnston usefully refers to as ‘self-consciously anthropocentric’ (Johnston 1995: 280), meaning that we finally accept that we are exclusively finite creatures and that our understanding of things will forever reflect our specific relations of dependency. The species concept loses its infinity by at last coming into the orbit of anthropological sensualism. As we have seen, this new intellectual trajectory in his later life involves a clumsy (and arguably unsuccessful) negotiation between a form of critical realism and an empirical realism. Nevertheless, the intention is to encourage a belief that our sensuous dependency reveals the indifferent Thou of nature as the force that produces us and at the same time constrains us to think about it within the confines of our system of interpretations and understandings of a nature that is indifferent to our very existence. Nowhere does he suggest it is possible to ever emancipate ourselves from those conditions.

This focus on what he thinks are the deficiencies of transcendence does not mean that Feuerbach lapses into nihilism. He remains an immanent utopian, even though he is no longer a trans-humanist. This should be obvious from what he has already said about the role of science in the continued progression of humanity. He does not, after all, abandon the species concept, but merely grounds it in his anthropological–sensualist system. He is still a humanist thinker in the sense that he is interested in highlighting our potential and powers as a species once we have been freed from the shackles of transcendence. It is only when freed from its comforting illusions (religious or secular) that we are free to maximise the potential that our finitude gives us. As Johnston has pointed out, anthropological sensualism is intended as ‘a liberating moment for the species, the necessary prolegomena to any future fulfilment by humans of their species-nature’ (Johnston 1995: 286). Once we recognise that our horizons are limited to our finite material existence, our social and political concerns become decisively this-worldly. On the one hand, it allows for an exclusive focus on alleviating the negative effects of our dependency on nature via technological and scientific progress. On the other, the removal of illusory notions about our fundamental needs and purposes in life affords our social and political discourse the clarity it needs to make inroads into threats to the achievement of our species’ needs, such as poverty, servitude and unfair obstacles placed in the way of the realisation of talent and ability. (As we will see in the next chapter, this implication in Feuerbach’s thought provides an important anticipation of historical materialism where anthropological sensualism is transformed into praxis.) We develop morals that are based entirely in our finite system of needs, rather than in anything transcendent, divine, infinite or trans-human. It is this that provides the focus for the emergence of a collective social identity – a universal concept of the dependent species, rather than a concept of the species as a universal being. It is no coincidence that Feuerbach’s intellectual development in his later years also witnessed his more active support for the radical Left.<sup>21</sup> There is the sense that his species concept should provide us with the means of pursing a collective identity based on what unites all of us – our complex relations of dependency and need. This social context is written into our very species-essence. Eudemonia is still

very much a feature of anthropocentric sensualism. Contra Johnston's own attempt to distance him from Marxism, I believe the later Feuerbach to be a proto-Marxist socialist thinker, insofar as he accepts what we will see in the next chapter as the finite-teleologism and finite-historicism vision of radical egalitarianism and communitarianism. There may even be evidence of a Feuerbachian contribution to radical ecologism in his insistence that the human condition is exhausted by our dependence on, and subjection to, the non-human environment.

There is evidence here of an interest in Romanticist attempts to reconcile humanity with a third dimension of universality (in addition to God and the Spirit) that embraces the passions – i.e. nature, via human community – although Feuerbach obviously rejects Romanticism for its tendency to embrace mysticism. Feuerbach proposes a naturalist-anthropocentric, rather than a pantheist, panentheist or materialist trans-humanist synthesis between the self and a deeper, more universal level of rational existence. Politics therefore becomes less an instrument to deal with a recalcitrant material self in the name of a non-human divine purpose or a perfected image of humanity than simply a means of the realisation of our rational species potential. I think that the Feuerbachian system's epistemological and ontological potential is most fully developed in its anthropological-materialism where the possibilities of a humanity-reason synthesis in nature are at their most suggestive with the concept of individual self-realisation in the community based on our system of mutual material needs.

One of the more curious facts about Feuerbach was that he formulates a theory that says almost nothing explicitly about social and political life, but has huge implications for it. One may speculate, with considerable justification, that the only reason why he was so obsessed with taking on religion was that its influence was pervasive, not just on the poisonous politics of the German academy that cost him his professional career, but also on the wider political culture of his time. It might not be an exaggeration to say that his attacks on religion – throughout his life – were politically motivated. If this is true, then there is one further important implication. In attacking religion for its deleterious effects on emancipative political ideas, he is not just pleading with us to discard our faith in God or religious leaders (saints, clerics, etc.) and seize on the promises of our finite species nature once we have done so. The logic of his position is also that neither should we place trust in secular “Gods” or messiahs either. We have seen, at least as far as his sensual anthropologism is concerned, that he has no time for scientism (despite wishing to elevate science to an enhanced sensual status) or infinite-historicism. We should learn to distrust, he tells us, the promises of a secular meta-utopia delivered by leaders, thinkers or even social classes. The idea of a redeemed humanity in this life is as much an anathema to him as that of one in the next. We will explore in the next chapter how this will put him on a collision course with Bloch.

One last comment is required in relation to the implications that Feuerbach's later shift to naturalism and sensualism has for post-secularism. Despite its problems, they are profound for religion. Religion is now seen as deriving from the

human recognition of an external nature as the primary object of contemplation, rather than human nature as such (Wartofsky 1977: 354). Thus, religious belief is the unification, not between an objectified human essence and the individual, but as the unification of the latter with nature. This takes the form of the objectification and personification of nature under the conditions of sensuous dependency, whereby its “otherness” is dissolved. And so the personification of nature is a feature of anthropomorphism. The sheer otherness of nature is personified into an objective Thou. But from the anthropocentric sensualist perspective (i.e. Feuerbach’s attempt at an undistorted view of the I–Thou relation), the latter retains its otherness as a force over and above us, which we can never hope to humanise. As we have seen thus, the later Feuerbach views the function of religion as the means whereby we come to terms with our utter dependence on something that is utterly indifferent to our well-being. By anthropomorphising it, we labour under the illusion that we have some kind of cosmic importance as a species. The purpose of religion is therefore an unmistakably meta-utopian one of freeing us from this unpleasant fact. As Feuerbach argues: ‘although the feeling of dependence upon Nature is the source and motive of religion: its very purpose and end is the destruction of such feeling, the independence from Nature’ (Feuerbach 2004: 30). It seems to me that this critique of religion’s meta-utopian function might almost equally apply to the species consciousness of the earlier Feuerbach, whereby we transcend the limitations of our finite sensuousness and achieve unity with infinity, albeit indexed to an anthropocentric (deontologised) phenomenology, rather than to anthropomorphic projections, as we have seen above in the critique of theism and Hegel. By rethinking religion as the response to our apprehension of an external natural object over which we can exercise only limited control, this escape from the meta-utopia of false religious consciousness to a secular alternative is not an option.

The reason why I believe that it is *EOR* and *LOER* that establishes Feuerbach’s status as a post-secularist is that under the terms of this new post-Hegelian theory of projection, he is reluctantly committed to the idea of the inevitability and even permanence of religious consciousness. Transcendence in general and the God Hypothesis in particular are the result of self-reflection on our condition of dependency. But remember that this condition is permanent, so there is reason to believe that Feuerbach is going to think that religion itself may be a permanent but regrettable feature of our existence, at least for some people. Contrast this to the polemic of *EOC* where he secularises transcendence in order to pull the rug from under theology, including Hegelian panentheism. But anthropological sensualism for the first time commits Feuerbach to a theory that associates religion with a permanent aspect of our consciousness. It is no longer simply a delusory psychological condition that we can transcend. This does not make religion any less false in its fundamental truth claims, but rather provides us with a reason to believe that, despite Feuerbach’s pronouncements, its total disappearance may be too much to hope for. It is a paradox of the later Feuerbach that it is only when he abandons Hegelian finite self-transcendence in all its forms and embraces instead a more straightforward naturalism and sensualism

that he becomes a significant contributor to immanent post-secularism, as we have already seen in [Chapter 2](#). It will be recalled that it is this approach that either tacitly or explicitly thinks the metaphysics of religious faith are false, but nevertheless detects an underlying rationality that sustains it. Near the beginning of *EOR*, Feuerbach makes a significant statement:

The assertion that religion is innate ... is perfectly true, if religion is considered to be nothing but that feeling of dependence by which man is more or less conscious that he does not and cannot exist without another being, different from himself, and that his existence does not originate in himself. Religion, thus understood, is as essential to man as light to the eye, as air to the lungs, as food to the stomach. Religion is the manifestation of man's conception of himself.

(Feuerbach 2004: 2)

Specifically, religion is the inevitable consequence of the feature of human consciousness that is unique to the species, what, above, I called the anthropocentric self-reflection on his conditions of dependency on nature:

But above all man is a being who does not exist without light, without air, without water, without earth, without food, – he is, in short, a being dependent on Nature. This dependence in the animal, and in man as far as he moves within the sphere of the brute, is only an unconscious and unreflected one; but by its elevation into consciousness and imagination, by its consideration and profession, it becomes religion.

(Feuerbach 2004: 2)

Religion, then, contra the anti-post-secularism of the radical Enlightenment and new atheists, becomes less a pathological projection and more an elevation into our consciousness of a state of dependence that we can never hope to transcend. Even if Feuerbach has decisively located the immanent sources of transcendent beliefs such as projection and reification in the state of our fundamental weaknesses, limitations and vulnerability to nature, he has also located a reason for the persistence of such beliefs with a great number of people. The possibility that, despite their best efforts, human beings will never escape senseless pain, suffering and injustice (inflicted by nature, if not least by human beings on each other) are reasons why religion and transcendence will always remain an attractive option for many. The response of some to the deconstruction of the rational grounds for transcendence provided by Feuerbach and others seems to be to immunise their faith from rational critique by elevating it to an epistemological “safe zone”. This is true not just of theistic meta-utopias, but also of non-theistic variants, such as Bloch's transcendental materialism, as we will see. There is a strong sense, then, once Feuerbach has finally dispensed with transcendence and embraced naturalism and sensualism, that religious consciousness, despite the falsity of its essential ontological truth claims, is evidence of the complex system

of dependency that human beings have on their natural surroundings. Unlike in *EOC*, the logic of this position seems to commit Feuerbach to the idea that it might not even be possible to imagine a future post-religious world. Despite the positive things that he has to say in *EOC*, there is the definite sense that he is envisaging a process whereby grasping the true (anthropological) content of religion is the passage to an atheist future for humankind. Perhaps the presence within its pages of a secular trans-humanism that will replace theistic religion filled Feuerbach with the confidence that a post-religious emancipative condition could be realised. The logic of the *EOR/LOER*, on the other hand, contains no such commitment, if anthropological sensualism is taken consistently. One gets the impression that religion might just be something we will have to put up with. In this sense, it is important proof of the limitations of our understanding of things, an inevitable by-product of our immersion in a world that we will never transcend, master or fully understand. It is testimony to the limitations of the human condition.

The picture of things that Feuerbach presents us with here is an important feature that helps us to place him in relation to the most famous of all of the Left Hegelians – Karl Marx. We have seen that, for Feuerbach, nature is to remain the dominant factor in human life in the sense that there seems little scope for emancipative practical activity in relation to breaking the bonds that it holds over the species. I will argue in the next chapter that this was anathema to the very early Marx (that is, of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*), whose humanism at this stage of his career exuded a greater confidence in the emancipative power of labour activity in mastering nature – a confidence that is evidence of the influence of the earlier Feuerbach. It seems there is, implicit within his pre-historical materialist analysis, scope for creative imaginings about our species potential, what we might call a more “spiritual” side to our material being. This is captured in a longing for freedom from our subjection to mere natural necessity that is made possible by our concrete labour activities. It is here that the futurist orientation to Marxism is best realised in the work of Bloch and where, I will argue, a more meta-utopian, meta-post-secular agenda can be located. We will have to wait for the transcendence of Bloch for the promise of a more “spiritual” materialism to come to fruition. To be more precise, I will argue that Bloch combines the infinite species concept of *EOC* with the Marxian theory of praxis to break free from the immanent utopianism of both Feuerbach and Marx in an ambitious attempt to construct a materialist meta-utopianism. I will also argue that, despite his best efforts, this vision has little in common with Marx and Engels’ historical materialism as formulated in the period after 1845. The implications that this will have for their conception of the “otherness” of nature and the problem of religion will be explored and contrasted with Feuerbach’s.

## Conclusion

The sensualist and naturalist re-orientation of Feuerbach’s earlier species-centrism in his later works is, I have argued, an important contribution to his

intellectual career. Rather than *EOR* and *LOER* in particular being merely additional statements on matters that he had already developed in the earlier works (especially *EOC* and *PPF*), they should be seen as qualitatively new ways to think about and justify his species concept. These ways are important, because they are evidence that Feuerbach is much more than a transitional figure between the meta-utopianism and transcendence of Hegel and the immanent utopianism of Marx. In rejecting Hegel's concept of finite self-transcendence, he is doing much more than just demolishing objective idealism. He is attacking meta-utopianism and transcendence in general. As we will now see, this criticism also applies to the early Marx and makes an important contribution to some of the issues that will concern historical materialism. The later works, despite their questionable realist credentials that can threaten to constrain Feuerbach to the anthropomorphic thinking he wishes to escape, provide valuable challenges to thinkers who take their point of departure to be the infinite species concept and ignore the important revisions of it by the mature Feuerbach. But conversely, we will also see that this concept of the *EOC* period also anticipates Bloch's attempt to immerse Marxism in the so-called "warm stream" of transcendence. This is a form of materialist transcendence that, in many ways, is a materialist application of core features of DCR and PMR in the formation of what I am going to call *materialist metaReality* (MMR). It is to this that we now turn.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Edward Toews, in his magisterial study of Hegelianism in early nineteenth-century German society, has argued that as early as 1828, Feuerbach had begun to distinguish between "formal" and "essential" Hegelianism. The former was Hegelian philosophy as represented by Hegel himself, while the latter was the concept of Absolute Reason and logic per se. The crucial issue of the relation between philosophy and religion was at the centre of this move by Feuerbach to distance himself from the great man himself (Toews 1985: 186–187).
- <sup>2</sup> It seems obvious that the dominance of Right Hegelianism in the German academic culture that Feuerbach was becoming increasingly estranged from played a considerable role in his desire to precipitate a revolution in Hegelianism. As Toews notes: 'Contemporary Hegelianism was the perspective of an academic school within Christian culture, rather than the universal perspective, the "religion" of a post-Christian "humanity", because the dualism of Christian culture was replicated within the Hegelian system itself' (Toews 1985: 196). Feuerbach was remarkably successful to this end in that he became the leader of the counterculture known as Left Hegelianism, but at considerable personal expense. *TDI* effectively ended his chances of ever securing paid academic employment. This poisonous atmosphere where Hegelianism was harnessed in the service of conservative Christian purposes might explain why a panentheistic interpretation of Hegel was not on the agenda for Feuerbach.
- <sup>3</sup> Marx Wartofsky traces the origins of this fundamental break with idealism to the year before, when Feuerbach published a book review. Once he had made the connection between Hegelian hypostatisation of Absolute Spirit and that undertaken by theology in 1838, he could deploy, both in 1839 and thereafter, his critical analysis firmly against what he dismissed as Hegelian 'mystical rationalism' (Wartofsky 1977: 172, 176).

- 4 We know from our discussion in the last chapter how reality depicted by the sense is “less real” than that of speculative thought, according to the theory of finite self-transcendence, since it is not self-determining. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel tells us that sensuousness is an illusory form of consciousness, because it

immediately appears as the *richest* kind of knowledge, indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth for which no bounds can be found.... Moreover, sense-certainty appears to be the *truest* knowledge [because] it has the object before it in its perfect entirety.

(Hegel 1977: 58, §90)

And in the third volume of the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* ([1817] 1978), he tells us that: ‘Although this [sensuous] consciousness appears as the richest in content, it is the poorest in thought’ (Hegel 1978: §418, 19). Sensuousness presupposes an existentialist ontology, according to which the external individual object has ontological primacy over and above universality. But for Hegel, the structure of language betrays the illusoriness of sense-certainty by its necessary universality, since

in it [language] we ourselves directly refute what we *mean* to say, and since the universal is the true [content] of sense-certainty and language expresses this true [content] alone, it is not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we *mean*.

(Hegel 1977: 60, §97 [emphasis in original])

- 5 I have chosen to call this phase “post-” rather than “anti-” Hegelian, because Feuerbach retains Hegel’s dialectical model of self-alienation, as we will see shortly. It is only when his species naturalism develops further in his later works and he abandons the dialectic of self-consciousness that he becomes anti-Hegelian.
- 6 We may note, in passing, the striking similarities with Bhaskar’s PMR concept of co-presence, which was explained in Chapter 1 as the deepening of the DCR concept 3L category intra-relationality to include spirituality and transcendence (Bhaskar 2002a: 234).
- 7 In a moment we will see how this idea, first expressed in *EOC* and *PPF*, is unshackled from its Hegelian moorings in the later writings and consequently establishes Feuerbach as a materialist–realist thinker. We will see that in *LOER*, there is the potential for cross-fertilisation with key TR principles.
- 8 Such a conflation of irreligion and immanence by Johnston is curious, not least because in his closing chapter he concedes that the later Feuerbach (i.e. post-1843) is opposed to secular humanism and its secularisation of religious concepts. Johnston does not deny that humanisms of various shades have often

defied Man, or substituted for the transcendent non-human God, a transcendent human god such as the Party, the state, the race, the proletariat etc. and have called for behaviours and attitudes towards such objects that seem not unlike worship

(Johnston 1995: 299)

which he calls ‘this-worldly transcendence’ (Johnston 1995: 307). He defines this non-religious transcendence as a source of intention that cannot be reduced to human agency, such as

an order or meaning or reason for things which is prior to or enjoys autonomy from human presence in the world, or the belief that human individuals are merely vehicles in the realisation of some larger, extraneous purpose or historical sequence.

(Johnston 1995: 307)

I will refer to such practices as *trans-humanism*, as we will see in this chapter. I will argue that Johnston is quite right to line up the later Feuerbach as a powerful opponent

- of this – which puts his mature intellectual development on a collision course with Hegelian and Blochean utopianism – but it is odd that Johnston often seems to also equate transcendence with belief in extra-human deities. It is also strange that he does not seem to locate a trans-humanist thrust to Feuerbach’s infinite species concept in *EOC*, because by its infinity it, by definition, transcends the system of natural needs characteristic of finite human existence. I will call the ‘this-worldly transcendence’ view that even atheistic belief can contain a commitment to transcendence, *transcendence-within-immanence*.
- 9** Given Hegel’s panentheistic concept of God, it might be appropriate to describe the inversion that Feuerbach undertakes as the transformation of the former’s immanence-within-transcendence into transcendence-within-immanence. Why this is a useful way to approach the issue is that, as I will argue in a moment, there are echoes of Hegel’s logic in Feuerbach’s atheistic treatment of the finite–infinite relation in *EOC*.
- 10** In fact, Wallace argues that Feuerbach embraces the spurious conception of transcendence, which means he fails to appreciate how Hegel’s theo-ontology endorses some aspects of theism, but rejects others: ‘Ludwig Feuerbach did not understand this simultaneous defence and criticism, but rather assumed that if one speaks of genuine transcendence, one must be speaking of something that is radically opposed to (rather than “within itself in”) what it transcends’ (Wallace 2005: 99). Although there is no evidence that Feuerbach was aware of panentheism, I think that Wallace’s dismissal does a slight disservice to him. As I will explain in a moment, Feuerbach in *EOC* operates with an atheistic application of Hegel’s phenomenology, which includes a conception of the relationship between finite individuality and the species concept that has clear resonances with Hegel’s own panentheistic logic.
- 11** For an interesting and informative discussion on the negative and positive currents in *EOC* and their respective influences on Marx and Bloch, see Vincent Geoghegan’s ‘Religion and Communism: Feuerbach, Marx and Bloch’ (Geoghegan 2004).
- 12** I think that since the species concept in *EOC* was formulated under the influence of Feuerbach’s critical engagement with Hegel, as we have seen, there is evidence that he grasps the fundamental components of the latter’s concept of God without realising that it is basically panentheistic. The term was almost certainly unfamiliar to him. This might explain why he opts to dismiss Hegel’s onto-theology as basically theistic. As I noted above, the conservative atmosphere of the German academy wherein Hegelianism was harnessed to a rigid Protestantism had personal as well as intellectual consequences for Feuerbach and provided him with an easy target. Had such an environment not been so prevalent, he might have been more sensitive to alternative interpretations of the system.
- 13** We have seen in the last chapter that there is an awkward association between atheism and objective idealism.
- 14** Feuerbach alludes to this in *LOER* when he says that in his earlier works, he ‘still took the position of an abstract thinker, and had not yet grasped the full importance of the senses’ (Feuerbach 1967: 13).
- 15** This new focus on projection as the hypostatisation of the capacity for self-reflective thought to formulate abstractions and posit them as real means that Feuerbach’s later system might be applied to a critique of panentheism. God, grasped as finite self-transcendence, is but an abstraction of human sensuous thoughts about infinity, unconditionedness, etc. projected onto an externality – i.e. made into an object.
- 16** Given Feuerbach’s rejection of Hegel’s ontology, this might be more precisely described as the *phenomenology of belief* in the objectivity of nature. With the passing of the concept of species consciousness, this phenomenology of belief rests on his more straightforward sensualism.
- 17** It seems, however, that Wartofsky identifies a continuing commitment to Hegel, which I dispute.

- 18 Contrast this with Alfred Schmidt's questionable reading of Feuerbach's philosophy of nature, according to which 'Feuerbach succumbed to the naïve-realist myth of a "pure nature"' (Schmidt 1973: 27).
- 19 This echoes the call of Peter Singer (Singer 1981, 1999) for an ethic de-coupled from the humanist moorings of atheism, where we acknowledge our unremarkable existence in nature and our morality consists less of superiority over other species and more of responsibility not to use our cognitive capacity to disrupt the natural ecological system.
- 20 Since he makes only a passing reference to Feuerbach by clumping him into the camp of crypto-theologians, it is unclear whether Fuller has actually read him at all and is simply making reference to the established academic view that his species universalism is his most valuable contribution to philosophy.
- 21 This does not, of course, mean that we have reason to believe that he would endorse the utopianism of the early Marx, whose youthful writings were not published until the 1930s, well after Feuerbach's death. Indeed, the only evidence we have of Feuerbach's endorsement of any aspect of Marxism was his reading and approval of Marx's *Capital* in 1868 (Wartofsky 1977: xx). He joined the German Social Democratic Party in 1870.

## 6 Atheistic metaReality?

### Historical materialism and Ernst Bloch's philosophy of the “not yet”

In the last chapter, we explored the evolution of Feuerbach's philosophy from the meta- and trans-humanism of *EOC* and *PPF* to the anthropological sensualism and empirical realism of *EOR* and *LOER*. This involved bringing to primacy the method of genetico-criticism to replace the phenomenological application of Hegel's concept of finite self-transcendence that I argued characterised Feuerbach's earlier meta-humanism. An immanent utopian naturalism came to replace transcendence-within-immanence, as we saw. Anthropological sensualism constituted a humankind–nature totality, according to which our sense of reality was sensuously mediated by a complex system of species' desires and needs. The species perspectivism that anthropological sensualism permitted enabled Feuerbach to replace the species universalism of his earlier work with a view of nature as an aspect of human activity. I suggested that despite the obvious post-Hegelian context of this, with the demise of the earlier species concept Feuerbach got tantalisingly close in places to arriving at grasping the world through something close to the subject–object dialectic. On the one hand, the species perspectivism that anthropological sensualism permitted enabled Feuerbach to replace the species universalism of his earlier work with a view of nature as an aspect of human activity. This stands in stark contrast to the dominant view of Feuerbach propagated in much of the literature, especially from the Marxist tradition. Alfred Schmidt, for example, in his otherwise excellent book on Marx's concept of nature argues that in the Feuerbachian system, ‘man the species-being, provided with merely natural qualities, confronts the dead objectivity of nature passively and intuitively rather than actively and practically, in a subjectivity that remains empty’ (Schmidt 1973: 27). The problem for Feuerbach is not that he confronts nature passively as such, but that the active relation of man with nature that species perspectivism demands does not take sufficient account of how human activity can actually be constitutive of objective nature itself. It does not seem to have occurred to Feuerbach how the “enhanced sensualism” of science might contribute to the formation of the material reality it seeks to understand and appropriate. Activity is grasped too narrowly as *thinking* activity, without seeing how the system of rationality, needs and desires gives rise to nature. The examples of thinking activity that Feuerbach gives – politics, culture and especially the “enhanced sensualism” that is unique to science – are not grasped in this context. As a result, his later materialism, despite its

rejection of the species concept, embraces a historicism of scientific development that departs from the perceived errors of transcendence and towards a more sophisticated grasp of our anthropological sensualism without realising that it might have more profound implications. This task would fall to Marx and Engels. As we will now see, this enabled them to move towards a constitutive concept of subjectivity. This would qualify historical materialism as a powerful example of immanent utopia. After exploring his, we will then explore the even more ambitious utopianism of perhaps the most unorthodox of all the Marxists – the process metaphysics of Ernst Bloch. Within his system, Marxism embraces transcendence, meta-utopia and meta-post-secularism. Although ultimately unsuccessful as an exercise in Marxist philosophy, I will argue that Bloch's thinking offers the potential for a post-materialist metaReality (hereafter PMMR) that has some similarities – as well as some fundamental differences – with Bhaskar's PMR. I will then attempt to draw out some of the implications for PMMR in the concluding chapter, where I present the case for what I call radical emergentist panentheism – the idea that metaReality is an emergent and irreducible stratum of material being.

## Marx and Feuerbach

There are both anti- and pro-Hegelian themes in Marx. He followed the later Feuerbach by taking up the explicitly anti-Hegelian position of positing nature as essentially twofold. First, it is the externality from which human beings emerge and evolve and provides them with their complex system of desires, needs and rationality. Second, since sensuous intuition is grounded in this system, it is exhaustive of human knowledge formation and so although there is the acknowledgement of the externality of nature the latter is not a homogenous lump of "otherness", but is always sensually mediated. Anthropological sensuousness, it will be recalled, posits the externality of nature as that which is capable of being mediated by human sensuous activity. Marx is also following the later Feuerbach, therefore, when he says that this externality is not some unmediated objectivism.

At various stages of Marx's intellectual development, we see passages that Feuerbach would probably not find particularly objectionable. We saw that Feuerbach defines nature in terms of its sensuousness (i.e. it is the sum total of all material objects capable of being grasped sensuously by human beings). He equates nature with all material things capable of sensuous apprehension:

In my use of the word I appeal to the senses.... [N]ature, say I, is every visible thing that is not the product of human hand or human thought ... nature is the being, or the sum of beings and things, whose manifestations, expressions, or effects, in which its existence and essence consist and are revealed, have their ground not in thoughts or purposes or acts of will, but in astronomical or cosmic, mechanical, chemical, physical, physiological, or organic forces or causes.

(Feuerbach 1967: 91)

We will recall Feuerbach's distinction between mere sensuousness (including our instincts, needs and desires), which belongs to the objectivity of nature and reflection (consciousness). But sensuousness includes human physiological processes that produce our system of needs. In this sense, human beings are part of nature. There is no possibility of arriving at a metaphysical principle of nature thus, because it is impossible to consider it independently of sensuousness. We also saw that Feuerbach posited a sensuous totality of body and mind – the interrelation of sensuous physiology (body) and consciousness (mind) – which I called *sensuous empirical reality*, which was the basis of his later concept of objectivity. Nature taken in isolation from this totality is, as we saw, abstract in that it is divorced from the only context in which it has meaning for human beings – i.e. our system of needs and desires. I called this the sensuous construction of a kind of reality-for-us. In this sense, Feuerbach would probably not find the following remark by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (hereafter *EPM*) written during the summer of 1844 too objectionable: 'nature ... taken abstractly, for itself – nature fixed in isolation from man – is *nothing* for man' (Marx 2009: 74 [emphasis in original]). For Feuerbach, in other words, nature has meaning only sensuously.

Marx would no doubt have approved of Feuerbach's wider agenda here – the dissolution of the transcendent species concept into sensuous perspectivism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it seems that Marx proceeds on a similar basis when, from at least 1846 onwards, he decisively distances himself from the species concept of *EOC*. But he also thinks that to simply equate perspectivism with the sensuous totality as Feuerbach understands it is too restrictive, because sensuous physiology remains dangerously abstract if it is truncated to merely thinking reflective activity. This is where Hegelian themes can be identified. Marx does to Feuerbach what Hegel does to Kant by making the constructive role of the subject a part of objectivity itself. This is achieved by transforming the other aspect of the later Feuerbach's system – mere sensuousness as part of nature – into objective labour activity. The weakness of the Feuerbachian sensuous totality is that it is therefore constrained to the simple facts of humankind's emergence and evolution from nature. Critical reflective consciousness is restricted to our understanding of this totality. It does not consider how thinking of sensuousness as part of nature might actually be part of nature's construction of itself. While Alfred Schmidt may be overgeneralising when he says that with Feuerbach we are in possession of senses that enable us to experience the world passively and intuitively rather than actively (Schmidt 1973: 27), as we saw in the last chapter this activity is restricted to mere thinking activity – critically reflecting on the system of sensual needs (*reality-for-us*). The system of needs that forever binds us to those conditions is therefore still considered somewhat abstractly, despite the passing of the species concept. There is no thought as to how the system might actually be part of *reality-in-itself*. Feuerbach's anthropological sensualism remains abstract and unhistorical, despite his disdain for reductionist materialism.

To say that we construct the world through our system of physiological needs is correct for Marx. But he would also insist that it is not good enough to speak

of it in terms of a reality-for-us. The genetico-critical method that species perspectivism demands remains insufficiently historical without recognising its capacity to actively make objectivity. And so the development away from species universalism towards perspectivism remains incomplete in the later Feuerbach and will need the critical input of Marx and Engels from 1846 onwards to realise its potential. The key point of departure from Feuerbach will be the return to Hegel's subject-object dialectic in objectivity. Conversely, the point of departure from Hegel will be the retention of the later Feuerbach's anti-metaphysics. As I indicated above, the key to understanding historical materialism will be Marx and Engels' view of human sensuous activity as part of nature's self-movement. It is to this that we will now turn.

### **Species perspectivism as nature's self-movement and Marx's revival of the Hegelian subject-object dialectic**

Marx's rejection of Feuerbach's reality-for-us committed him to a revival of the subject-object dialectic that – as we saw in [Chapter 4](#) – was the basis of Hegel's subject panentheism. One need only invoke the principle central to TI: that by virtue of the intra-relatedness of the finite and infinite, subjectivity is a constituent element of reality. We saw in our discussion on Hegel's logic that finite reality depended for its self-determination on going beyond itself to infinity. It must be self-transcendent in order to exist. Nature and history (especially human history) are not self-determining in themselves, but are reliant on the subjectivity of the infinite. This was finitude understood as finite self-transcendence. Similarly, infinity defined as *finite* self-transcendence requires finitude in order to exist. What I propose here is that Marx and Engels operate with a basically Hegelian conception of freedom as the determination of matter by subjectivity. This is the nuance of their departure from the abstract materialism of species perspectivism and formulation of subjectivity's active role in the constitution of nature that characterises their historical materialism. But there is a crucial difference between their understanding of the dialectical process and Hegel's that involves the dissolution of his metaphysical system (including his teleology and eschatology). The subject-object intra-relation is to be understood as *nature's* self-movement. It is *only* in this restricted sense that Hegel was correct to say that the subject constructs the object. Marx is here appropriating Feuerbach's materialist critique of the Hegelian system as anthropomorphic by pointing out the pre-existence and ontological primacy of a natural world indifferent to human well-being. Accordingly, I will attempt to demonstrate that Marx preserved the Hegelian contention that the objective world is constructed by the subject (contra the later Feuerbach) and combined it with Feuerbach's sensualist principle that the latter is a *human* subject and not a divine principle, thereby guaranteeing external nature's independence from and primacy over thought (contra Hegel). The result is a theory that documents how the active human labour process constitutes its own object that has non-metaphysical implications. This is the means whereby historical materialism appropriates Hegelian logical

principles and incorporates them into an immanentist–materialist system. I will also argue that this exempts Marx and Engels from accusations of meta-utopian thought as I have defined it. This will set the scene for my engagement with Bloch’s attempt to construct a meta-utopianism on the foundations of historical materialism, according to which directionality, purpose and meaning that is to the benefit of humanity can be located in nature’s self-movement.

In contending that historical materialism is influenced by the Hegelian approach to nature’s formation I am making the claim that it is indebted to certain core principles of subject panentheism. We saw in [Chapter 4](#) how Hegel’s view of freedom and consequently his philosophy of nature (as well as his philosophy of history and politics) only really made sense in the context of this interpretation of his philosophy of religion – i.e. nature as finite self-transcendence. The relevant point here is Hegel’s departure from Kant’s dualistic conclusion that rationality must transcend nature in order for freedom to be realised. In accordance with TI, nature and freedom cannot be grasped as oppositional, contra the CI. Rather, due to the negation of the negation (which we saw posits selfhood as intrinsic to matter’s ontological status), rationality and freedom (defined as self-determination) are necessary aspects of nature’s being. As we saw, the condition of possibility of finite things existing at all (having being) is the necessity that they transcend their limitation as finite things and become infinite. Bare unconscious materiality cannot fully exist thus, because it is without its connection to the criteria of existence – rationality and freedom. And we also saw how this intra-relationality of TI commits Hegel to the idea that selfhood (subjectivity) is an intrinsic part of divine substance. The point that is especially relevant for the Hegel–Marx dialogue is that substance can only be if it already contains the subject within it – necessity/determination must contain self-determination/freedom. This was the subject panentheistic core of Hegel’s objective idealism.

The addition, of course, of species perspectivism to Marx’s appropriation of Hegel will have the effect of divesting the role of the constitutive subject of any metaphysical or transcendent significance and instead locate the dynamics of the subject–nature interaction in the latter’s *self*-movement. The crucial modification of its Feuerbachian form is, as I have just said, Marx’s definition of sensuous activity in terms of socially mediated labour activity, rather than just thinking activity as such. Sensuous activity immediately becomes a force of nature’s activity and movement. It has a real constitutive impact on its subject matter. In an important sense, Marx would have had little difficulty with Feuerbach’s above claim that nature is independent of ‘human hand and human thought’. The existence of extra-human nature as the condition of human life processes is not disputed. In the *EPM*, Marx tells us of man that:

...as a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited creature, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his instincts exist outside him, as *objects* independent of him.... To say that man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being full of

natural vigor is to say that he has *real, sensuous objects* as the object of his being or of his life, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects.... A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature.

(Marx 2009: 69 [emphasis in original])

When Feuerbach speaks of how the objects of nature ‘have their ground not in thoughts or purposes or acts of will, but in astronomical or cosmic, mechanical, chemical, physical, physiological, or organic forces or causes’, we need to keep in mind that the discovery of these causes via the natural sciences is an act of enhanced sensualism, which is itself the most epistemologically advanced example of species perspectivism. But in so doing, he forgets how the sensuous discovery of these laws is itself mediated by labour processes:

Feuerbach speaks in particular of the perception of natural science; he mentions secrets which are disclosed only to the eye of the physicist and chemist; but where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this pure natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men. So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the basis of the whole sensuous world as it now exists, that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing.

(Marx and Engels 2000: 20)

Considered in this way, nature itself becomes a socio-economic–historical category in the sense that it only has meaning and purpose for human beings as they labour to meet species’ needs. Marxist thinkers who broadly agree that there is a significant Hegelian influence on even the mature Marx have tended to take up one of two positions on this specific issue. First, labour is the mechanism whereby the subject creates nature – a kind of “nature-for-humanity” as it were. To be sure, this is when nature becomes stamped with the mark of our desires and consciousness, which we can identify with and where we can feel at home. But it is also more than this. It is when new forms of matter – qualitatively distinct from all other forms – actually come into existence that otherwise would not. This is materiality that fully emancipates human beings from conditions of compulsion and so represents a qualitatively new form of existence. It is especially under these conditions that nature then becomes the domain of freedom and rationality, rather than just existing as a mechanical alien substratum utterly indifferent to our interests or even whether we exist.

This idea of the creative power of labour activity has certainly featured prominently in Hegelian Marxism, not least in Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* ([1923] 1990). The Hegelian connotations of Lukács’ interpretation of

Marx's view of nature are clear when he says that 'Nature is a societal category. That is to say ... nature's form, its content, its range and its objectivity are all socially conditioned' (Lukács 1990: 234). Lukács interpreted Marx's appropriation of the subject-object dialectic as an endorsement of Hegel's vision of the active subject who consciously creates the world, while at the same time transforming him/herself. This process involves 'a positing of the objects, where the duality of subject and object ... is transcended, i.e. where subject and object coincide, where they are identical ... this unity is *activity*' (Lukács 1990: 123). Lukács takes as his point of departure Fichte's post-Kantian ontology of the embodied subject (the world-constituting active Ego) – what we discussed in Chapter 4 as the metaphysics of subjectivity – when he says that 'the ego-principle ... can be taken as a starting point and as a guide to method' (Lukács 1990: 122). Accordingly, 'we see here the origin of the philosophical tendency to press forward to a conception of the subject which can be thought of as the creator of the totality of content' (Lukács 1990: 122–123). And with Hegel, the cultural, social and political implications of the metaphysic of the world-constituting subject are fully realised via his formulation of the active subject in panentheistic rather than pantheistic (i.e. Fichtean) terms. It is revolutionary also in a metaphysical sense. Humanity is grasped as the most important product of nature – a key moment in nature's self-movement and evolution where it finally acquires consciousness and so can transcend its own finite externality. Although Lukács is yet another example of a follower of Hegel who does not seem to grasp the original system as panentheistic, he was very alive to these revolutionary implications. I will call this interpretation of the Hegelian presence in historical materialism *strong Hegelianism*.

Second, we could take a very different view to that of Lukács. Like the strong Hegelian view, it contextualises labour activity as nature's self-movement. But rather than reducing nature to the status of a social category, we could, in accordance with the later Feuerbachian dissolution of metaphysics, insist that the activity of the subject is not intra-related to materiality in any ontological sense. That is, like strong Hegelian Marxism, we must posit the existence of a material substratum that is pre-existent and the condition of possibility of the emergence and evolution of humankind. But the point is that it is permanent and so are the restrictions it places on the character of labour activity, the most obvious of which is the denial that we can produce anything that is qualitatively distinct from the original material substratum. I think that this latter position is closest to Marx's own thoughts. For him, like the strong Hegelian Marxists, human labour becomes an emergent stratum of nature itself – a kind of "humanity-within-nature" as it were – but there is no sense in his writings that this could ever lead to qualitatively different forms of matter emerging in a future (Communist) society.

For Hegel, we will recall, central to the completion of finitude's self-transcendence is the overcoming of the condition of alienation where it sees itself as external to Spirit. This dissolution of alienation is the moment when finite things see themselves as infinite (i.e. as finite self-transcendence) and

Absolute Spirit sees itself in those things (i.e. as *finite* self-transcendence). The dissolution of alienation therefore represented the transcendence of the externality of nature and we saw how human history, culture and politics were all central to this realisation. But in stressing the later Feuerbachian moment, Marx is positing the permanence of this externality and therefore the dissolution of any transcendent implications for subject–object relations. It follows that in Communism when labourers are said to take full command of the processes whereby they constitute their world around them, there will still be the nature-imposed compulsion to work – i.e. the production of use-values.<sup>2</sup> As Marx makes clear in *Capital* ([1867] 1977a) (hereafter *DK*),

labour as a creator of use-value ... is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race; it is an eternal nature-imposed necessity, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and nature, and therefore no life.

(Marx 1977a: 50)

Later on in the text he repeats: ‘The labour-process ... is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore independent of every social phase of that existence’ (Marx 1977a: 179). There is a subject–object identity to be sure, but Marx’s acknowledgement of the permanence of nature as the ever present *external* force compelling us to work is evidence that he rejected any notion that the identity was of a metaphysical character. For this reason we are justified in locating a metaphysical non-identity at work in historical materialism and a rejection of transcendence.

It is in this restricted context that the subject–object dialectic is (if we insist on using the word) “creative”. In humanising nature, labour activity tailors the material environment to meet species’ needs. Nature is “tamed” as it were, so as not to seem such a hostile place. The fact is, however, that we are emergent from a natural world that remains, despite our best endeavours, utterly indifferent to our well-being and existence. This is the moment when any ambitions we might have to identify a kind of materialist transcendence in the principle of humanising nature should be quashed. Ontologically speaking, labour is not actually *creative* at all, if by creative we mean creating qualitatively new forms of matter. It is, rather, merely *transformative*<sup>3</sup> – i.e. ‘the labour-process ... is human action with a view to the production of use-values, [the] *appropriation* of natural substances to human requirements’ (Marx 1977a: 179 [emphasis added]). This is the limitation Marx places on the humanisation of nature. In *DK* he points out that human beings ‘can work only as Nature does, that is by changing the *form of matter*’ (Marx 1977a: 50 [emphasis added]). And in *Anti-Dühring*, Engels argues that this transformative capacity is the only kind of freedom that human beings can enjoy: ‘Freedom does not consist of any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends’ (Engels 1977: 140).

In this way, we can understand Marx as a truly naturalist philosopher – humanity (including our labour powers, society, culture, politics and history), as emergent properties of nature, cannot make significant inroads into its externality. On the one hand, transformation signifies the humanisation of nature and, on the other, the naturalisation of human beings. In the *EPM* – where Hegel's influence was at its strongest – Marx discussed this, but in the context of the species-essence (i.e. under the influence of Feuerbach's *EOC*), when he argues that Communism is

the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e. human) being as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism.

(Marx 2009: 43 [emphasis in original])

In the realisation of the species-essence there is – as we have seen – the meta-utopian expectation of securing a state of existence where the externality of nature is overcome in an ontological unity of subject and object. In *DK*, however, there seems to be a very different (i.e. less strongly Hegelian) understanding of the nature of this identity. There is greater emphasis on humankind, as a natural force, constrained to operate within the laws it sets down:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants.

(Marx 1977a: 173)

In this context, the “humanisation of nature” cannot be seen in *EPM* terms, i.e. of the creative power of humanity – our ability to create forms of matter is the objectification of a species-essence – but rather in terms of the appropriation and transformation of the raw materials of nature in accordance with our life needs. Labour is therefore grasped less in terms of a species-essence (i.e. within the framework of transcendence-within-immanence) and more in terms of a mechanism of nature itself from which it cannot hope to emancipate itself. And by appropriation of nature for human purposes, Marx means nothing more than endowing matter with social qualities – i.e. the transformation of nature into use-values. Use-values cannot, therefore, be seen as the means of emancipation from natural compulsion and domination.

## Teleology in historical and dialectical materialism

The ever present need to socialise nature in this way was sufficient proof for Marx that human beings must submit themselves to its extra-human laws. It is in this context that we are to understand his criticism of Feuerbach's account of how scientists discover causes in nature. The understanding of nature via the latter's enhanced sensualism is possible only through our socialisation of it or, as Schmidt has put it, 'men can only become certain of the operation of the laws of nature through the forms provided by their labour-processes' (Schmidt 1973: 98). But this does not mean that labour processes provide us with the key to overcome the externality of the natural world, only that our subjection to those laws will change form as the character of labour changes. We cannot emancipate ourselves from nature's domination. All we can do is alter the form that domination takes throughout history.

This is the extent of Marx's willingness to identify any purpose or directionality to the subject-object dialectic. Given that the dialectic was predicated on the rejection of any metaphysical identity the extent to which this relation represented a higher unity or identity of any kind was limited to his grasping of the purposes to which human labour was directed – i.e. satisfying the requirements of the life process. The key mediation here is the evolution of the instruments of labour. This is the perfect example of what we mean when we say that labour activity endows matter with social qualities, because the instruments that humans use to sustain themselves (i.e. tools) are themselves use-values. But this endowment exhausts the teleology of nature. Indeed, we may not even think we are justified in calling the process "teleological" at all. Just as I explained in the Introduction in relation to Darwin, it might be more accurate to say that historical materialism involves *apparent* teleology. What is clear is that the subject-object unity is evident only in the context of the means whereby nature, as part of its self-movement, produces material forms that can sustain human life. There is no deeper or wider cosmic purpose to this relationship between humanity and the natural world. Indeed, the very things that mediate the relationship (tools) are stamped with the mark of the permanence of our subjection to nature (i.e. their status as use-values).<sup>4</sup>

In its original Hegelian formation – where we know it performed a crucial function in the realisation of finite self-transcendence – the subject-object dialectic renders labour a moment of Spirit, a necessary component of divine panentheistic purposes in the world. By contrast, in the Marxian materialist adaptation, Spirit is no more than a moment of nature's self-movement embodied in labour. We may usefully distinguish between Hegelian and Marxian philosophy of nature on this issue by calling the former's endorsement of a wider cosmological significance to human economic production *infinite*-teleological activity in the unfolding of the Concept, a process of its self-mediation. Conversely, as Schmidt has pointed out, Marx's restriction of it to the self-mediation of nature is best described as 'finite-teleological activity' (Schmidt 1973: 106).

Generally speaking, a rejection of infinite-teleologism is Hegelian Marxism's point of departure from Hegel's own idealist system (although when we look at Bloch's rather eccentric Marxism we will see that this is not always such a straightforward claim to make). The cleavages in Hegelian Marxism focus on what should be meant by finite-teleologism. This is of relevance to asking what role transcendence, metaReality and the like might have in Marxist thought. A fairly popular way to approach the divergence between what I have designated as weak and strong Hegelian Marxism is to identify a distinction between Marx and Engels. The argument is that they interpret the significance of nature's self-movement rather differently. Marx's position has already been made clear – positing the subject-object dialectic where nature's teleological and purposive movement is restricted to, and exhausted by, human life processes. Engels, on the other hand (despite the glaringly obvious fact that he co-wrote the treatise of finite-teleological materialism – the *GI*), is said to endorse the attempt to attribute wider cosmic significance to the human role in natural teleology. The production of use-values is not simply a crucial means of securing human well-being with the rest of nature, but is part of a deeper and ultimately extra-human process. Nature's self-movement encompasses a cosmic process of which humankind is only a part, albeit a (even "the") crucial one. This is where we get into the domain of trying to formulate materialist versions of transcendence and metaReality. It should hardly surprise us that one of the strongest proponents of this interpretation of Engels should come from Ernst Bloch, whom I will be considering in a moment. For now, it is sufficient to note his enthusiastic endorsement of Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* as an exploration of the creative potential and dynamic openness of matter (Geoghegan 1996: 121). As we will see in a moment, I do not share this interpretation, because it has very little to do with either Marx or Engels' intent. Before I introduce Bloch's own arguments, I want to explain in more detail my reasons for thinking that Marx and Engels were careful to restrict the subject-object dialectic to the human life process (i.e. a rejection of meta-Hegelian Marxism). This will be accomplished by exploring their attempts to reconcile historical materialism with the most explosive theory regarding the self-movement of nature in terms of biological life processes –namely, Darwinism.

### **Teleology and consciousness: nature's self-movement in the evolution of human intentionality**

Marx and Engels were particularly interested in Darwin's account of how life-forms utilise their physical attributes in their struggle to adapt themselves to their environments. In a very real sense, they have themselves evolved to become *natural technologies*. Thus, at a very primitive level, the fact that life-forms have adapted and survive is evidence of the kind of natural (finite) teleologism that historical materialism embraces – purpose and direction in nature as plants and animals adapt and survive. It is primitive because it is obviously an *unconscious* process. In a sense, primitive humans (and, as we will see in moment, our pre-human ancestors) evolve their own natural technologies:

Darwin has interested us in the history of Nature's Technology, i.e., in the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which organs serve as instruments of production for sustaining life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man, of organs that are the material basis of all social organisation, deserve equal attention?... Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with Nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them.

(Marx 1977a: 352, note 2)

This last sentence where ‘mental conceptions’ become relevant to the evolution of natural technologies of humankind is very important. It is the moment when teleology becomes conscious and this only happens with the arrival of human beings. Nature equips itself (albeit entirely unintentionally) with potentially the most powerful mechanism of its development. As we have seen, what makes human beings unique is their ability to operate beyond what nature has given them (i.e. their physical bodies) and transform it in the production of use-values, both in the production of tools and the uses to which those tools are put in further production. And we know that for Marx, use-values are social. This is what Marx meant above when he defined use-values as socially endowed nature – the combination of physical matter, consciousness and tools.

So it is with the emergence of the capacity for nature to be “socialised” or “humanised” that teleology becomes conscious. Labourers can imagine humanised nature before they transform raw materials of the physical environment around them. This is a powerful new moment in the history of nature’s teleological self-movement to be sure. So in the above quotation Marx wishes to extend the scope of Darwin’s concept of natural technologies to include humanity’s socialisation of nature’s self-movement, because it is the crucial moment when nature evolves a remarkably sophisticated means of transforming itself – consciousness.

Although pre-dating Darwin’s discoveries by some thirteen years, Marx and Engels’ thinking would soon turn out to be compatible with the theory of human evolution by natural selection (which they both enthusiastically endorsed) (Ball 1979). In particular, their belief that human society and history should be seen as aspects of nature’s self-movement could easily be reconciled with biological evolution:

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. We cannot here go either into the actual physical nature of man, or into the natural conditions in which man finds himself – geological, orographical, climatic and so on. The writing of history must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.

(Marx and Engels 2000: 6)

They are saying here that we must start our analysis of human society and history from the facts of human biological constitution and the nature of the physical environment with which human beings must interact in the process of the sustenance of themselves as biological organisms. But Marx and Engels are saying much more than this. Darwin himself, as we will now see, hamstrung his own theory of natural selection by operating with a defective conception of the relationship between consciousness and nature. Our consciousness (our species-powers) is indeed determined by the current stage in our biological evolution. But this does not mean that that stage is simply the product of our adaptation to a static physical environment out of which consciousness arises, which can then be regarded independently of those conditions. This is a point of weakness that we can identify in even the later Feuerbach, despite the passing of the species concept. This view has also been prevalent in much of the scientific community since Darwin's time and has been repeated in more recent studies. The most typical example has been the concept of the "meme" formulated by Richard Dawkins and developed by Daniel Dennett, so it would be instructive to pause for a moment to consider its weaknesses from a historical materialist perspective.

In his book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1996), Dennett argues that Darwinism is so "dangerous" precisely because it is a "universal acid" that threatens to consume all aspects of our understanding of nature and humanity. Dennett endorses so-called "neo-Darwinism" in explaining biological, chemical, physical and sociological processes. In terms of its explanatory power therefore, it is said to go '*all the way down*'. But it also goes '*all the way up*', as Dennett tells us, to include consciousness:

Darwin's idea has been born as an answer to questions in biology, but it threatened to leak out, offering answers – welcome or not – to questions in cosmology (going in one direction) and psychology (going in the other direction). If redesign could be a mindless, algorithmic process of evolution, why couldn't that whole process itself be the product of evolution, and so forth, *all the way down*? And if mindless evolution could account for the breathtaking clever artifacts of the biosphere, how could the products of our own 'real' minds be exempt from an evolutionary explanation? Darwin's idea thus threatened to spread *all the way up*, dissolving the illusion of our own authorship, our own divine spark of creativity and understanding.

(Dennett: 1996: 63 [emphasis in original])

From a Marxist perspective, Darwinism does indeed involve such a universal acid in that it has massive implications for our understanding of the human social, political, economic, cultural and moral world, but not in a "greedy" reductionism of the sort just mentioned, rather a more nuanced appreciation of the unique character of human evolutionary mechanisms. Unfortunately, this does not commit Dennett to the *dialectical* emergentism that seems to be important to Marxism, as I have argued elsewhere (Agar 2006) and as we have seen is central to DCR. Rather, the alternative application he approves of is the

idea of a “meme” formulated by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* ([1976] 1989). In short, as part of its assault on the ontological primacy of mind, Darwin’s universal acid consumes the pretensions to autonomy of sociology, politics and morality. But in doing so, it seems to me, Dennett embraces some very crude forms of materialism that suffer from unwarranted reductionism and debilitating abstractions that tell us little of interest about the human social subject.

The meme is perhaps the most pertinent example of such crudities. This takes the neo-Darwinian idea that biological organisms (including humans) are bearers of genes that are perpetuated through the struggle to survive and reproduce and applies it to the reproduction of cultural ideas. Instead of using biological organisms to reproduce themselves as genes do, memes use human minds. Dawkins and Dennett think memes are a useful concept in preventing socio-biology from going down the road of a rather perfunctory and simplistic determinism of assuming that adequate knowledge of social mechanisms can be reached by merely regarding human beings as bearers of genetic material. Memes are the result of recognising that human consciousness is an emergent phenomenon that is irreducible to the outworking of simple genetic replication, despite the fact that it is the result of such evolutionary processes. Memes are in response to the obvious fact that humans are capable of adapting to their environment in ways that are additional to simple genetic mutation. Their intellectual capacities are such that – via technology and sophisticated social organisation such as language (Dennett 1996: 338) – they can imagine new ways of interacting with the world around them.

At this point, Dennett reveals his commitment to an influential tradition that denies the presence of any form of teleology in nature. He has in mind extra-human teleology in the form of divine purpose for which he insists there is no evidence. He does so by invoking his own metaphors of “cranes” and “skyhooks”. What natural selection has revealed is that purpose – whether primitive or the appearance of consciousness – in nature is the product of mindless natural processes. Darwin tells us, in his typically understated way, that given ‘the pointless regularity of physics – I [Darwin] will show you a process that will eventually yield products that exhibit not just regularity but purposive design’ (Dennett 1996: 65). One product or effect of this process that is of particular interest to human beings is intentionality – the capacity of living things to act on their environment to achieve certain objectives – that emerges through many algorithmic steps. Darwin therefore decisively proved beyond any reasonable doubt that mindedness, far from being the initial cause of such material processes as bio-evolutionary algorithms, is one of its most spectacular effects (Dennett 1996: 70). The idea that we can identify teleology in the processes of the biosphere has therefore been decisively disproven once and for all, because the causal primacy of Mind in accounting for the complexity and adaptive capacities of the species has been exposed as myth. Dennett refers to Mind First ontologies as invoking “skyhooks”, which are devices that extend from the air (e.g. pre-existent Mind) to explain something on the ground beneath (e.g. material processes such as evolution) with all the question-begging that that involves (such as explaining

how the skyhook itself came into being) (Dennett 1996: 74). Skyhooks lift massively complex phenomena (such as human minds) out of the cumbersome and tedious, purely natural, material processes. Conversely, algorithmic evolution is a good example of a “crane” – a non-questioning begging device that explains such complex phenomena as the result of precisely such natural processes occurring over a vast period of time, whereby the vast distance between chaos and design can be achieved by a mindless process (Dennett 1996: 75).

Thanks to memetic replication we can now see human culture as ‘not just a crane composed of cranes, but a crane-making crane’ (Dennett 1996: 338) in the sense that it has massive effects (i.e. its phenotypes as it is known in evolutionary biology) that are much quicker to emerge than anything that genetic replication can manage. This, of course, does not involve the invocation of skyhooks, but merely the acknowledgement ‘that we now have cranes of more general power than the cranes of any other species’ (Dennett 1996: 491). Dennett uses the example of how memes that involve changes in lifestyle and diet have led us to be somewhat physically taller than our ancestors of even a few centuries ago (Dennett 1996: 338). And through language these intellectual innovations are passed down to subsequent generations. The Darwinian “explanatory template” (if we may call it that) consists of the fact that we have cultural replicators analogous to genes. Dawkins’ enthusiasm for cultural replicators in *The Selfish Gene* is due especially to the work of anthropologist F.T. Cloak (1975), who applied the Darwinian explanatory template to the study of how cultures evolved. Dawkins describes the meme as

a unit of cultural transmission, or unit of imitation.... Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain.

(Dawkins 1989: 192)

Examples of good memes that have survived in most cultures include the wheel, music, writing, education, wearing clothes, the right triangle and the alphabet, to name but a few (Dennett 1996: 344). Another vital meme is, of course, religion, which Dennett argues is sustained by the meme for faith – a remarkably successful meme predicated on the discouragement of critical judgement (Dennett 1996: 349).<sup>5</sup>

The main problem with using the concept of the meme to explain human behaviour is that it ignores the fact that ideas arise as the result of the dialectical interaction of biological, psychological, social-anthropological, political and economic factors – a typical failing of socio-biology. It equates actual concrete human beings with an abstract evolutionary theory regarding the development of ideas. In other words, it embraces a biological determinism that reduces the complexities of the human consciousness, if not directly to the dictates of genetic replication, then to a memetic analogy that is hopelessly abstract. Dennett applies the Darwinian explanatory template to the social world in such a way

that is ignorant of important sociocultural and historical contexts, thereby producing a social theory that is sustained by abstract materialism. I argue, in contrast, for an application of the template that is sensitive to the complexities of humanity's interaction with the productive material conditions from which ideas arise. I wish to present the case for an application of the template that can account for the unique condition in which the distinctive character of human consciousness arises, which makes cultural replication and social evolution possible – namely, co-operative forms of labour as presented in Marx and Engels' historical materialism.

Dawkins and Dennett, as we have seen, restrict their analysis of the impact of consciousness on our biological constitution to the facts of our uniquely evolved consciousness that makes memes a unique feature of human society. For example, Dennett notes how selective pressures placed on the species for hundreds of thousands of years are alleviated in a matter of a few generations by the pace of cultural evolution (Dennett 1996: 338–339). Presumably these include the human species-powers of abstraction, reflectivity, intentionality and self-consciousness enabling humans to formulate new and innovate ways of interacting with the world around them – the preconditions of memetic formation and replication. This is a materialist doctrine by virtue of its neo-Darwinian credentials, but it is nonetheless an *abstract* materialist doctrine in that no thought is given to the possibility that our species-powers might be more than the social and cultural result of the current stage of our biological evolution, but may themselves be the outworking of social and cultural evolution. When such abstraction of species-powers from socio-history takes place there is a tendency to accord primacy to the domain of ideas. It is therefore vulnerable to precisely the type of thinking that Dawkins and Dennett have been at pains to discredit – namely, idealism. They seem to think that by simply removing skyhooks from the equation and identifying the application of Darwin's universal acid to society we can construct a robust materialism. They fail to arrive at adequate accounts of the processes of how human consciousness and language emerged in the first place. Historical materialism, on the other hand, is clear that the course of our biological evolution was decisively influenced by the unique character of our productive labour. In short, any application of the Darwinian explanatory template must consider the role of *praxis* as presented in historical materialism. As we will now see, this necessitates the transformation of the abstract mechanical materialism of Dawkins and Dennett into a theory that accounts for evolutionary processes in nature that give rise to humankind in terms of the subject-object intra-relation.

As I have argued above, our biology bears the imprint of the ways we interact with and as *part of* nature, or how we apply our species-powers, a form of interaction that sets us apart from all other species – namely, co-operative forms of labour to produce use-values. Thus, our biological constitution is itself a product of that historical interaction. Marx and Engels allude to this when they comment on how our biological needs are themselves transformed by our productive activity. Human socio-history begins at the moment when our labour activity acts back upon the physical characteristics that gave rise to it or, as they contend,

‘the satisfaction of the first need … leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act’ (Marx and Engels 2000: 10). And in *DK* Marx is very clear on the matter when he says that man, ‘by thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature’ (Marx 1977a: 173). The natural history of our biological evolution which gives rise to our unique consciousness cannot, contra Feuerbach, be seen in isolation from our sociocultural history of concrete labour processes. To do so merely makes an idealist abstraction of our consciousness or as Marx and Engels say ‘[c]onsciousness is … from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all’ (Marx and Engels 2000: 11). This is a crucial point, because it means that the physical environment in which we experience selective pressures on our survival will be markedly different to that faced by other species. Marx and Engels would say of the meme, functioning as it does in the interests of liberal democratic ideas in general and socio-biology in particular, that it is the product of the division of labour in class society whereby ‘consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice …; consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of “pure” theory’ (Marx and Engels 2000: 43). Consciousness, therefore, as an emergent product of our biology must be grasped in the context of the socioculturally mediated capacity we have to use our species-powers to alter the environment in which Darwinian processes of biological evolution take place. In this way Darwinism must be applied to the uniquely human reality of our labour activity, rather than simply imposed onto humanity without any sensitivity to the uniqueness of the human condition. This is the only way to avoid the invocation of cranes that have an unmistakable idealist character, as Dawkins’ and Dennett’s (and even the later Feuerbach) clearly have. The cranes of human society that Marx and Engels invoke are properly materialist, because they take into account the ability of our historically and concretely applied species-powers to react back on physical and biological evolutionary processes that give rise to them. They make the case clearly in *GI* when they contend that ideas (or “memes”) are:

…necessarily, sublimates of their [humankind’s] material life processes, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach [mechanical materialism] the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method [historical materialism], which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.

(Marx and Engels 2000: 9)

This critique was directed towards mechanical and abstract materialism (and as such would apply to even the later Feuerbach), but its polemic can just as easily be directed towards the materialism of Dawkins and Dennett. By replacing sky-hooks with the mechanical ‘crane of all cranes’, they endow the latter with a deterministic independence from concrete material processes akin to the sky-hooks they are supposed to replace; they are emancipated from the dialectical context of their practical/historical application in the form of labour and made the ‘starting-point’ of the Darwinian analysis of society. Historical materialism, by contrast, acknowledges the primacy of humans’ ‘material production and their material intercourse’ in the emergence and transformation of their ‘real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking’. It is thus ‘the real living individuals themselves’ that form the starting point of the historical materialist application of the Darwinian model. Indeed, in 1871, when Darwin eventually turned his attention to humankind in *The Descent of Man*, Engels was provided with the opportunity to attempt this dialectical reworking of his ideas that has important implications for paleo-anthropology (Woolfson 1982: 2–3).

### **Engels’ labour theory of culture**

The best place to explore this theory is Engels’ prophetic ‘The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man’, which appears in his *Dialectics of Nature* ([1925] 2002). In this extremely important work, Engels applies the historical materialist method to research in human paleo-anthropology and paleo-ontology that was emerging at the time he was writing. Such research was, however, in its infancy and it was not until well into the twentieth century that Engels’ hypotheses developed in this work were confirmed, often with astonishing accuracy. Although largely speculative, the central hypotheses of what has become known as his *labour theory of culture* have been retroactively corroborated by leading scientific research in the field. I argued in *Rethinking Marxism* that Engels’ application of historical and dialectical materialism was broadly consistent with the methodology that informs DCR (Agar 2006: 166–172). In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* ([1888] 1988) he takes aim at precisely the kind of mechanical materialism that sustains the concept of the meme, because it fails to account for the increasingly dialectical character of nature as suggested by the findings of natural science. The philosophy of Feuerbach, Engels tells us, is hamstrung by its ‘inability to comprehend the universe as a process – as matter developing in an historical process’ (Engels 1988: 27). This reflected ‘a metaphysical, i.e. anti-dialectical manner of philosophising’ (Engels 1988: 27). As we know, this ahistoricism results in Feuerbach’s abstraction of human species-powers from the concrete conditions of existence. But it is also the framework within which Dawkins and Dennett apply their concept of the meme. Engels, on the other hand, sensitive to the scientific developments away from seeing nature as pure mechanism, arrives at a dialectical conception of human nature and uses it to hypothesise an innovative and soon-to-be retroactively corroborated theory of human origins.

In particular, Engels' analysis provides human evolutionary theory with the crucial ingredient in explaining the hitherto misunderstood (not least by Darwin himself) original impulse towards brain development in our earliest hominid ancestors, sometimes called "the missing link" between hominids and modern humans. This ingredient was the result of Engels' speculative application of key dialectical principles of historical materialism to the issue of human evolution that has since been empirically corroborated – namely, the role of *social productive labour*.

The "missing link" concerned the question of whether the evolution of bipedal locomotion (walking upright on two legs) and co-operative labour pre-dated brain development in our earliest ancestors or whether the reverse was true. Darwin held to the latter position, but Engels supposed that the former was the case (Harman 1994: 85; Woolfson 1982: 5–6). He argued that it was the freeing of the hand that resulted from the evolution of the bipedal mode of walking that created the impetus towards co-operative labour (by making it possible), language and brain development:

Many hundreds of thousands of years ago ... a specially high-developed race of anthropoid apes lived somewhere in the tropical zone [east African Rift Valley] ... they lived in bands in the trees.... These apes began to lose the habit of using their hands to walk and adopted a more erect posture. This was *the decisive step in the transition from ape to man*.

Other diverse functions must have devolved upon the hands. The first operations for which our ancestors gradually learned to adapt their hands ... could only have been very simple ones.... But the decisive step had been taken, *the hand became free* and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity ... [this] development of labour helped to bring the members of society together by increasing the cases of mutual support and joint activity ...

Men in the making arrived at the point where they had something to say to each other. Necessity created the organ; the undeveloped larynx of the ape was slowly but surely transformed by modulation to produce constantly more developed modulation, and the organs of the mouth gradually learned to produce one articulate sound after another.

The reaction of labour and speech on the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of conclusion, gave both labour and speech and ever renewed impulse to further development.

(Engels 2002: 85, 86, 87 [emphasis in original])

The key processes that Darwin mentions are all here – bipedal locomotion, tool-making, hand development, co-operative labour, emergence of speech and brain development – but Engels' re-ordering of the stages was crucial to his resolution of the issue regarding what caused brain development in the first place. For the first time, we have the hypothesis that it was the development of unique modes of labour in our hominid ancestors that was the dynamical force in the evolution

of the mental faculties that would make reflective thought, language and all the other uniquely human capacities possible. And so while Dawkins, Dennett and even Darwin himself begin at the point of the emergence of intelligence and use that fact as the basis of their conception of the human essence, Engels postulates that it is the unique character of labour in pre-human and human species that has explanatory primacy in accounting for such developments. The key factor in explaining the biological distinction between early humans and the rest of the animal world was the unique access that the former had to nature given to them by tool-making and speech, because these opened up the means whereby problems they faced with securing their means of subsistence could be innovatively overcome.<sup>6</sup> As he tells us:

In short, the animal merely *uses* external nature and brings about changes in it simply by his presence; man by his changes makes it serve his ends, *masters* it. This is the final, essential distinction between man and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings about this distinction.

(Engels 2002: 90 [emphasis in original])

Contrast this account with the considerably more limited – and idealist – version offered by Darwin when he says that the difference between humans and other higher mammals consists

solely of his [man's] larger power of associating together the most diversified sounds and ideas ... the difference in mind between man and the higher mammals, great as it is, certainly is one of a degree and not of kind.

(Darwin 1930: 95)

Chris Harman draws our attention to anthropologist Bruce Trigger's comment that:

Darwin was ... constrained by reluctance to challenge the primacy which the idealistic religious and philosophical thinking of his time accorded rational thought as the motor in bringing about cultural change. Hence in discussing human evolution ... it was the development of the brain that in turn resulted in tool use.

(quoted in Harman 1994: 86)

This commitment to an idealistic conception of rational thought as the key evolutionary dynamic frustrated progress in paleo-anthropology for some fifty years. The “missing link” was therefore posited as being a quadruped with a human-sized brain. It was not until the discovery of a complete three-and-a-half million year old skeleton with an ape-sized brain and erect posture in 1974 that Darwin's hypothesis was finally abandoned (Harman 1994: 86). Indeed, a subspecies of the ape *Australopithecines* was discovered, known as *Australopithecine afarensis*. These apes had ape-sized brains with no aptitude for tool use, but they were

nevertheless bipeds. It has been widely accepted, since the highly publicised discovery of the partial skeletal remains of one of these creatures named “Lucy”, that these apes are direct ancestors of modern humans (Harman 1994: 185; Woolfson 1982: 19).

This historical materialist application of Darwinism of course depends on identifying the selective environmental pressures placed on our earliest ancestors that drove evolution along the lines that Engels suggested. As it happens, such evidence is forthcoming, due to significant climatic changes over the past seven or eight million years. Eminent anthropologist Richard Leakey has noted that global cooling and geological events in the East African Rift Valley had the effect of thinning the once-thick forests in the region. This coincided with the emergence of the first hominids. And over two-and-a-half million years ago, a second major global cooling event produced a cooler, drier climate across the globe, including East Africa. This had the effect of introducing selective pressures on all species leading directly to the emergence of *Australopithecines* and *Homo sapiens*.<sup>7</sup> The new climate created vegetation, thus making the traditional hominid diet more difficult to subsist on. There was the potential to expand the diet and *Homo sapiens* did just that by introducing meat. For Leakey, this was a key development, because it afforded these pre-humans the opportunity for brain reorganisation and development, as meat is rich in calories, fat and protein – all of which are widely recognised as key to brain development (Creaven 2000: 53–54). But, of course, this potential for dietary expansion would never have been realised without the capacity for tool innovation and co-operative labour discussed above. And the latter, in turn, then gave further impetus to the evolution of still more efficient forms of bipedal locomotion as an embryonic hunter-gatherer mode of economic subsistence gradually emerged in *Homo habilis* pre-humans (Creaven 2000: 54). This economic structure went hand-in-hand with socialised modes of food distribution, because the latter reinforced social and communal ties necessary for the efficient working of the hunter-gatherer system. There was, in short, an evolutionary logic at work since bipedalism, tool development, co-operative labour and brain development encouraged selection in favour of increased sociability and egalitarianism, which created a further dynamic towards ever more complex social structures and interactions. This, in turn, encouraged selection in favour of ever more increased brain development to cope with these complex social conditions (Creaven 2000: 55).

### **Marxist-Darwinian teleologism: DCR, ethics and epistemology**

Darwinism must therefore be applied to human society in ways that are sensitive to the fact that natural selection operated in a wider dialectical and emergentist framework – environmental and climatic changes leading to selection in favour of bipedalism. This, in turn, lead to the development of tool-making technologies involving co-operative and socialised economic relations, which then led to increased brain development, which led to more efficient bipedalism,

tool-making, socialisation and so on in a continual dialectical intra-relation. This was a kind of embryonic form of Bhaskar's four-planar social being or social cube that we discussed in an earlier chapter of: (1) material transactions with nature; (2) interpersonal intra- or inter-action; (3) social relations; and (4) intra-subjectivity. Each category (tool-making technologies, co-operative and socialised socio-economic relations, brain and consciousness development, linguistic capacity, etc.) must therefore be seen as an ontological relation involved in necessary internal relations with other emergent strata. Thus, human society must be seen as a 3L totality of internal geo-historical causal powers (rhythmics). This is a powerful example of what Bhaskar calls 'entity relationism' (Bhaskar 1993: 125). The teleology of nature's self-movement posited by historical materialism, where the evolution of conscious purpose in nature creates new possibilities for its own transformation via the human production of use-values, is to be understood in this context. This new dimension to nature is this 3L totality.

It is for this reason that it is evident that a dialectical application of the SEPM model is of such explanatory significance when arriving at a materialist account of consciousness that avoids: (1) the infinite-teleologism of metaphysical idealism; (2) the idealist materialism of socio-biology; and (3) materialist transcendence characteristic of strong Hegelian Marxism. In relation to (1), the 3L totality of SEPM has dissolved Hegel's infinite-teleologism into the natural (finite) teleologism of the Darwinian-Marxist conception of history, as we have seen. Accusations of an unwarranted anthropomorphic grasp of teleological processes of the kind we explored in Feuerbach's critique of Absolute Spirit in the last chapter are of relevance here. In relation to (2), the Darwinian critique of "Mind First" ontology is insufficient in itself to finally dispense with idealist interpretations of human consciousness. For this reason, as we have seen, the socio-biology favoured by Dawkins and Dennett is an unworkable mechanical materialism with idealist implications. Understood in historical materialist terms, the ontological relation accorded explanatory primacy by socio-biologists in the evolution of modern humans – modern human brain physiology and consciousness – is exposed as merely an *abstract expression* of a totalised, concrete, interconnected social relation. Once dialecticised in the way that Engels' labour theory of culture proposes, consciousness becomes necessarily a concrete material relation with labour forms and primitive technologies that he and prominent paleo-ontologists and anthropologists describe. In short, the example of how we can adequately describe the evolutionary processes at work in the origins of humanity powerfully demonstrates the poverty of Dawkins' model of memetic replication and the fecundity of the Marxian alternative. Only when applied to a historical materialist context does the Darwinian explanatory template flourish in studies of human society. And in relation to (3), four-planar social being remains subject to the laws of natural selection. The socialisation of nature is permanently determined by laws of the material substratum of which it is merely an emergent stratum, thus ruling out the possibility of postulating the emergence of extra-Darwinian laws within "socialised matter". We must

remember that, as finite-teleological in essence, conscious praxis is but an emergent stratum of a totality that is nature's self-movement and as such will remain subject to her laws.

This all has significant implications for Bhaskar's theory of transformative praxis and emancipatory ethics. Engels' model of human origins provides valuable insights into attempts by human agents to overcome detotalised conditions by absenting crucial absences that are constraints on the realisation of their species potential. The historicisation and dialecticisation of the concept of human nature that Engels' labour theory of culture surely necessitates renders the transformative praxis on the terrain of the social cube comprehensible only in the context of the cumulative development of the material productive forces and production relations. In short, Engels' intra-related totality of evolutionary selection mechanisms and historical socio-economic-cultural forms is both the terrain wherein human species' needs and capacities originate and are scientifically identifiable and also the possible constraints on the satisfaction of those needs and realisation of those capacities. Human nature, being and consciousness are embodied in definite material-natural relations that are human subjects. From this we can formulate concepts of freedom and justice and devise emancipatory strategies designed to absent constraints on their realisation that are sustained by oppressive social structures. In essence, given that the modern human being is a product of the intra-action of evolutionary mechanisms and co-operative forms of labour, it logically follows that our species' needs and transformative capacities in nature be grasped in these terms. Emancipatory discourse and action will therefore be predicated on the absenting of alternative oppressive forms of society and imagining the possibilities of replacing them with socialist alternatives where the realisation of freedom and justice is not predicated on competitive and egoistic socio-economic practices, but rather on reciprocal altruism.

The historical materialist approach to understanding human nature and consciousness therefore offers the possibility of developing a thoroughgoing materialist grasp of Dennett's analogy of the crane that is missing from his own socio-biological application of the Darwinian explanatory framework. For Dennett's "societal crane", because it embraces an abstract humanism, is vulnerable to abstract notions of human freedom, justice and fulfilment, just as we saw above that it was vulnerable to abstract conceptions of consciousness. If our biologically determined needs and capacities are intra-related with socio-economic-cultural practices, then ethical theories are necessarily historical and concrete in the sense of reflecting the cumulative historical and dialectical development of these needs and capacities. Accordingly, any system of ethics that is abstractive of any one of these key relations will involve little more than an unwarranted shoe-horning of a universal model onto specific material conditions.

This does not, of course, mean that Marx and Engels held to a relativist view of human nature. The historical materialist model involves, as we have seen, the identification of universal species' properties that are the very means of distinguishing us from the rest of the animal kingdom rendering the Marxian

application of the Darwinian explanatory template necessary in the first place. It is, given conscious teleologism, our unique powers, capacities and needs (reasoning, reflectivity, language, the character of our co-operative labour power and our emotional and creative needs) that enable Marx and Engels to formulate a general conception of human nature that is the outcome of the current state of our evolution. This vision of humanity is precisely what is either suppressed and alienated or affirmed and realised, depending on the historical material conditions to hand. Our nature is a historical product of Darwinian–Marxian processes of our earliest pre-human and human ancestors and is, as such, subject to alteration in accordance with these processes. We saw this above when Marx noted how our acting on the material conditions to hand has the effect of producing new needs, transformative capacities and powers. The acknowledgement of this intra-relation in terms of nature's self-movement represents a profoundly historicist approach to human nature. As Sean Sayers argues:

According to the historicist approach ... it is not possible to distinguish what is natural and what is social in this way [i.e. by totally separating universal from social need]. There are not two distinct and externally related components here: a universal need on the one hand and a series of socially developed preferences on the other. There is only one thing: a socially modified need. Moreover, our needs are always modified by our social lives. They exist only in this socially developed form, and are mere abstractions apart from it. The natural and social aspects of our being always exist in concrete unity.

(Sayers 1998: 153)

But given the relative endurance of this ‘socially modified need’ in natural evolutionary time scales, our species’ needs and powers are permanent features of our evolutionary development. Marx and Engels make this clear, as we have already seen from the quotation above, regarding the ‘first premise of human existence’ in the *GI* being our biological constitution understood as an ontological relation with our forms of socio-economic–cultural activity. But our species’ needs and powers, such as reflective thought, language, co-operative labour power and emotional needs, in their current form have been features of our natures for tens of thousands of years. As we have seen above, the biological constitution of modern humanity has been a feature of life since well into the pre-history of the species. And so Marxian historicism, despite its rejection of a fixed and eternal human nature, is a far cry from the fashionable post-modern attempt to abstract social needs entirely from the facts of our biological constitution. Richard Rorty, for example, argues that human beings are ‘children of their time and place, without any significant metaphysical or biological limits on their plasticity’ (Rorty 1992: 148–149). This is a kind of anti-humanist essentialism that has become something of a trend within political theory in recent years. But it is as problematic as anything produced by socio-biology, because it employs an equally abstractive approach. If Feuerbach, Dennett and Dawkins are guilty

of abstracting human biology from its social and historical context, then Rorty is guilty of the equally problematic abstraction of our social and historical character from our biological determinants. On the one hand, we have an abstractive shoe-horning of the Darwinian explanatory template onto human society with the socio-biologists and, on the other, its complete rejection by the post-modernists. Only with Marx and Engels do we see a historicist application of the template that is sensitive to precisely the uniquely human reality of both aspects being constituent parts of an intra-related ontological totality.

The point about Marx's rejection of a relativist view of human nature is relevant to (1) and (3) above – i.e. the rejection of metaphysical teleologism (in other words, the idea that we can identify *final goals* to nature and humankind) precisely because it asserts the *permanence* of the life process that ties us to nature's external laws. The 3L totality of labour processes that gives rise to consciousness does not break out of its determination by the laws of the material substratum.

We must also remember that it commits Marx and Engels to the rejection of any notion of a fixed epistemological foundation. This is the historical materialist critique of the abstract rationalism of the later Feuerbach's enhanced (scientific) sensualism. Scientific concepts are, rather, reflections of the historically mediated sets of relations between human beings and nature. If enhanced sensualism represented progress away from Kant's idealist isolation of the subject-object relation from the sensual life-process (as we have seen in the last chapter), then historical materialism is progress away from Feuerbach's abstract treatment of that relation by virtue of the 3L totality – i.e. by treating it *dialectically*. This is the Hegelian moment improving on Feuerbachian materialism where epistemology must be connected with world historical processes of the subject-object development. As we have seen, Hegelian Marxism then departs from Hegel by placing primacy in the labour situation – i.e. by positing the resultant teleologism as finite, rather than of wider (infinite) ontological significance. But Hegelian Marxists then depart from each other on the issue of the so-called “creative” power of the Subject. It seems to me that an important feature of the weaker version is an unacknowledged (and possibly unconscious) return to an important Kantian principle. As I have explained elsewhere (Agar 2006), Marx's own endorsement of the weaker Hegelian Marxist position has remarkable similarities to the CI concept that the world-constituting power of the subject is premised on the co-existence of a world of extra-human nature that remains indifferent to, and is the condition of possibility of, the object-for-us. Marx's task is the recovery of the idea that our knowledge of the world is reflective of concrete (historical) material life-processes without making the mistake of reworking – on a materialist basis – the Hegelian error of imagining a subject-object identity. Kant's positing of the extra-human domain of objectivity, demonstrating that the domain of the creative subject was not exhaustive of reality, performs this latter task. The result was a materialist version of the Kantian/Hegelian principle of the world-making power of the subject, but grounded in a dialectical–Darwinian principle of the permanence of extra-human laws of nature with which the subject interacts in the social production of his/her life.

## Bloch's meta-utopianism: transcendental materialism

The fact that the world-constituting activity of the subject is presented in terms of the pitiless struggle of nature should be sufficient to dissuade anyone from identifying a transcendent or meta-utopian thread in Marx's thinking. By the time that he and Engels formulated their historical materialist system, they had divested themselves of the abstract materialism of the *EPM* and the Feuerbach of *EOC*. We saw in the last chapter that one of Larry Johnston's main lines of attack on historical materialism was the tendency for Marx to embrace a historicist version of *EOC*'s concept of "Man" in contrast to the later Feuerbach's sensualist naturalism. This leads Marx, so Johnston insists, to the deification of "Proletarian Man" as the force of nature that can transcend its finite limitations in the realisation of a Communist utopia. Unfortunately for Johnston, there is no such evidence that Marx (or Engels) held to this position. We have seen that finite-teleologism – upon which historical materialism is constructed – exhausts both nature and the human condition, so it is quite simply impossible for the theory to sustain any such conception of transcendent humanity. Historical materialism can be grasped in, at best, an immanent utopian frame. The presence of Darwin was the primary reason why it is unfair of Johnston to identify a class-based reworking of Feuerbach's species concept. This might have been present in the *EPM*, but it has nothing to do with historical materialism.

This has not prevented some prominent Marxists from exploring the meta-utopian potential of the system. Perhaps the most prominent (and certainly the most ambitious) attempt has been the transcendental materialism of Ernst Bloch. He tries to achieve a synthesis of the finite-teleologism of Marxist–Darwinism and the subject–object identity of infinite-teleologism. In *Spirit of Utopia* ([1923] 2000), he argues that processes of evolution are nature's search for human consciousness:

...there is a free, open, human-seeking quality in the progression from algae to fern to conifer to deciduous tree, in the migration from water into the air, or certainly in the strange delarvation of worm as reptile as bird as mammal, in the struggle for skeleton and brain. Tentatively ... there takes place here a testing, retaining, rejecting, reusing, erring, reverting, succeeding, a delegating to reflex, a leap towards a new formation quite familiar to us. There is an impulse towards the brightness ... only in man himself can the movement towards the light, proper to all creatures, become so conscious, or be carried out.

(Bloch 2000: 233–234)

The purpose of this quest is to open up the means for the emergence of qualitatively new forms of being within nature. This 'movement towards the light' reveals Bloch's central metaphysical category – the transformation of utopian Hope into an ontological concept. Satisfaction of the life process does not by any means exhaust the utopian condition. Indeed, Bloch identifies a transcendent purpose to our strivings for the betterment of our conditions. He posits 'the

*external, cosmic* function of utopia sustained against misery, death and the husk-realm of physical nature ... that is why we go, why we cut new, metaphysically constitutive paths' (Bloch 2000: 248 [emphasis in original]). As Leszek Kolakowski has intimated, this is tantamount to an atheistic reworking of transcendence. To posit Hope as a metaphysical category has its origins in religious transcendence 'where hope is not an emotional state but a form of existence touched by the grace of God. Bloch, on the other hand, believes that although hope is part of being, it is actualised by human activity' (Kolakowski 1981: 448). From this perspective, Hope is a latent component of nature that is activated, as part of its self-movement, in the activities of human beings. The finite-teleologism of Darwin and the weaker Hegelian-Marxist tradition is transformed into a much more ambitious infinite-teleologism that has more in common with Hegel than Marx. The former's theo-metaphysic of finite self-transcendence is given a materialist transformation, whereby the narrow focus of mere Darwinian understandings of humankind's emergence is transcended by the invocation of matter's latent capacity to formulate qualitatively new forms of being from within itself. It is this that is nature's ultimate purpose. Bloch's metaphysics is therefore a powerful example of what I call *transcendence-within-immanence* and is the outcome of his reworking of the immanence-within-transcendence principle that is at the heart of Hegel's concept of Spirit.

The points of convergence and divergence between the two aspects of being – finite and infinite – are demonstrated by Bloch's separation of Hope into two dimensions: penultimate and ultimate (West 1991: 31–32). This involves identifying subjective and objective poles of Hope in both dimensions. The former contains human desire and consciousness of a perfected form of existence and is anthropological as such. The latter contains the ontology of Hope itself, of the being that is latent in nature or *not yet*. It is in penultimate utopia that the life process occurs – the humanisation of nature and naturalisation of humanity. Bloch was therefore naturally attracted to Hegelian Marxism. He was especially impressed with Lukács' concept of the active subject and there is evidence that the latter's *History and Class Consciousness* accelerated Bloch's utopianism-Marxism synthesis (Geoghegan 1996: 13–14; Hudson 1982: 34–37, 39). But there were points of fundamental disagreement as well, not least Lukács reduction of subject-object to a purely social intra-relation. As we have seen, Lukács interprets the unity in terms of the activity of the life process – nature's self-movement in terms of its socialisation. For Bloch, the resultant social totality involved an impoverished materialism where the outcome of the historical dialectical process was only the emergence of the "social man" that class society concealed. We might say that Lukács failed to realise the full transcendent-utopian potential of Hegelian Marxism, because he failed to identify the so-called "eccentric" contents of consciousness that were irreducible to social explanations (in particular religion) (Hudson 1982: 40). He goes beyond Lukács by emphasising the importance of the trans-empirical utopian longings of "transcendent man" that are best manifested in religious consciousness and remain unexplained by the dissolution of nature into social praxis. In a sense, Bloch's

grasp of the self-movement of nature was closer still to Hegel's original intent – the struggle of the subject to find a finite substance that is adequate to it (i.e. matter as *finite* self-transcendence). It is this intent that captures the essence of the not yet. I will explore this in more detail in a moment, but it is worth stressing from the outset that in highlighting this stronger Hegelian influence, Bloch was not positing a substratum to nature akin to Spirit. He remains true in this sense to the basic Darwinian–Marxist point about humanity emerging as part of nature's self-movement. Before I expand on this important point, a fuller introduction to the metaphysics of Hope would be instructive.

### **Bloch's process materialism: the utopian metaphysics of the not yet**

Bloch's transcendent thinking – including his analysis of much of the content of the religious experience and tradition – posits a fundamental rational utopian content to the human consciousness. This envisages a future state of existence of an emancipated and liberated humanity and is expressed in his eschatology. To embrace the not yet is to embrace the idea that the consciousness has the capacity to anticipate future non-empirically manifest utopian states of existence that fundamentally transcend the immediately given of the concrete empirical “now” and thus identifies trans-empirical truths about the human condition and the concrete possibilities for their empirical realisation. It is *concrete* utopia in the sense that it is awakened by the identification of not yet categories that reside in material reality and illicit this awakening in the consciousness in the first place. Scientific grasp of material conditions can point to a transcendent future material reality towards which humanity is (at least) capable of progressing.

Since religion is the fundamental means whereby this imagination is expressed, Bloch feels that we need to take religious metaphysics and transcendence seriously, not in the sense that they point to the existence of a cosmic super-subject, but in that they capture in a distorted (i.e. alienated) way the imaginings of a world that is not yet finished, but which contains latent possibilities of utopia within it. Bloch replaces the *vertical* transcendence of theism and panentheism with the *horizontal* transcendence of his atheistic process materialism.

It follows from all of this that, for Bloch, the world is in a constant temporal process of change; it is essentially unfinished. This made him instinctively opposed to any epistemology that ontologised the world on the basis of the way it appears to us at any particular time. Rather, epistemology should be predicated on what empirical phenomena had the potential to become transformed into; what the present appearances of things yields above all else is knowledge of future possibilities that are latent within them. In this he is demonstrating the differences between static metaphysical categories of closure and processional; fluid and experimental categories of his own Open System metaphysics. In the former, the world was something given from its inception and an underlying substratum was posited that tended to be “the idea”, “spirit” (Hegel) or “matter” (Feuerbach, Marx). The latter, on the other hand, posited an unfolding ontology

where nothing was settled, as Bloch describes in *Atheism in Christianity* (1972, hereafter *AC*):

The term ‘metaphysics’ ... seems to have decayed, when you look at it historically ... this metaphysics has become paralysing, transfixing, indeed even underhand in the way it has ... bolted a static door in the face of the real *Meta*, the Tomorrow within the Today.... The new philosophy, on the other hand, both despite and because of its real *Meta*, is by no standard just more old metaphysics. For its relationship to the Not-yet-manifest does not allow of the slightest hint of an ‘*ontos on*’; of an ontology, therefore, that being inwardly agreed and settled as the Behind-there, has got everything completely settled and behind it. To be sure, it is also ontology of a sort (this field has not yet been cleared of Positivism not of other forms of agnostic eunuchry), but only the ontology of Not-yet-being – Not-yet-essentially-being.

(Bloch 1972: 66 [emphasis in original])

Although Bloch is a materialist, he is rejecting the non-dialectical systems of empiricism and positivism as espousing an abstract conception of matter engaged in fixed relations of mechanical causation. In the three volume *The Principle of Hope* ([1954, 1955, 1959] 1995, hereafter *PH*), he states that: ‘Matter ... is not the mechanical lump ... [it] is Being which has not yet been delivered; it is the soil and the substance in which our future, which is also its future, is delivered’ (Bloch 1995: 1371). This is the philosophical terrain on which he constructs a processional materialism that is steeped in dialectics.

Given that the world is “not yet”, it is in a constant state of expectation, because the predicate of existing reality has not yet been produced (Hudson 1982: 89). Bloch insists that all things in the world can only be understood in terms of what they can yet become – everything is a “not yet” in the sense that it has a latent need to become something else and it has the potential to become it. This is why Bloch’s metaphysics are open, because being is still developing in a direction that cannot be decided in advance. Within existing reality there is not-yet-existing reality (Hudson 1982: 90). This is a kind of ontic duality within the object between its existing actual state and its ‘objective real possibilities’ (Hudson 1982: 90).

Humanity has a central role in this process of becoming. Bloch conceptualises the human consciousness as a creative force emergent within nature and so rejects the Cartesian duality of Kant and others between an active humanity and essentially external nature. In *PH* in particular, subjective (anthropology of Hope) and objective (non-human onto-cosmological process) poles of Hope are brought together as parts of a “world-process”. Once nature has produced conscious humanity from within itself, the dynamic of the world-process lies in the activity of the subjective pole. That is, the objective Hope within nature is made conscious with the emergence of humanity. Accordingly, ‘the full potentiality of nature can be activated only through human intervention’ (West 1991: 99).

There is a deep correlation between the not yet conscious and not yet being. As part of the material not yet, humankind itself is unfinished and, like nature, human being in actuality is defined by what it can become in objective real possibility. Humans are, for Bloch, not yet truly in existence, because they are defined in terms of the active realisation of as yet unrealised desires and needs. Some of their powers are not yet actualised and others are denied as a result of alienating forms of social existence – in particular, class society. Those desires that are not yet realised are ‘expectant emotions [which] essentially imply a real future; in fact, that of the Not-Yet, of what has objectively not yet been there’ (Bloch 1995: 75). These ‘expectant emotions’ (Bloch 1995: 74) include positive hopes for and negative fears of the future and are distinguished from other desires of envy and jealousy, which are directed towards objects that are available ‘in the already existent world’ (Bloch 1995: 74) and so are directed towards the short-term future. Consciousness is therefore future-oriented – it contains an intrinsic utopian thrust that is the driving force of human activity. In fact, Bloch argues that humans not only live in the future, but in a distinctively *utopian* future. This projection forward to a utopian state of existence is known as the *anticipatory consciousness*. But at all times we must remember that it is a consciousness that is formed in the context of its interaction with nature (Hudson 1982: 94). The utopian tendencies of the anticipatory consciousness are part of a larger process that is the onward development of the material universe itself (Geoghegan 1996: 153). We have a utopianism that has a conception of the human consciousness as a non-dual phenomenon in its organic connection with materialist processional ontologism.

### **Bloch's materialist mysticism: penultimate and ultimate utopia**

Concrete utopia conceived as latent objective possibility energised by human praxis involves positing an organic interrelation between consciousness and cosmic nature not least because the latter, despite its latent future utopian possibilities, often contains impediments to world completion (Hudson 1982: 102). A great deal of the onus is thus placed on the role of human cognition in the constitution of future states of being. For Bloch, the anticipatory consciousness was a key energising force in the development of what the world had the potential of becoming, of bringing to realisation the non-actualised objective possibility. These are the subject-object poles of objective world-process in the sense that the actualisation of the concrete potential of a material object relies on its apprehension in the anticipatory consciousness; the latter as an emergent material stratum of nature that is crucial to the realisation of cosmic potential:

...this concept [of hope] lies in the horizon of the consciousness that is becoming adequate of a given thing, in the risen horizon that is rising even higher. Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still

not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole.

(Bloch 1995: 7)

The Hope of concrete utopia is therefore an objective Hope in the sense that it is not merely something that exists in the anticipatory consciousness, but resonates into the material cosmos. The roles of penultimate and ultimate stages of utopia are important in bringing this to fruition. As stated above, the former involves the life process. As with Lukács, the role of the creative subject is emphasised in the subject-object dialectic of nature's self-movement. Indeed, it is the most important moment in nature's development: 'Thus human activity with its consciousness is itself explained as a piece of nature, moreover as the most important piece' (Bloch 1995: 261). We have here the capacity for the consciousness to be embodied in matter – an interpretation of historical materialism where the transformative impact of the former on the latter is identified as the result of definite activities of the life process. As is characteristic of Hegelian Marxism, this precludes either the fixed teleology of Absolute Spirit or the rigid determinism of vulgar materialism.

Furthermore, the fact that consciousness operates within the life process helps us understand why Bloch insists that utopia must be concrete. Objectively real possibilities provided by definite relations of productive activity act as a restraint on hopes and dreams, including those revolutionary visions of the socialist future. Bloch criticised the abstract thinking of the so-called "utopian socialists" that Marx and Engels had disparaged so vehemently. So, penultimate utopia contains the anticipatory consciousness of socialist hope that is only realisable once the concrete productive conditions of the life process make it a viable option. These are its subjective and objective dimensions.

A crucial aspect of this level of utopia is Bloch's claim that it contains not only wish-images of a better society, but also wish-images of technological utopia:

utopian intention is confined neither to the mere inner dream-enclave nor the problems of the best social constitution either ... it has all the object worlds of human work in its favour.... There are technological wishful images as well as social ones.

(Bloch 1995: 623)

Hope as an ontological category of nature is stressed here:

[j]ust as a Not-Yet-Conscious, which has never been conscious before, dawns in the human soul, so a Not-Yet-Become dawns in the world; at the head of the world-process and world-whole is this Front and the vast, still so little understood category of the Novum.

(Bloch 1995: 623)

Bloch posits the horizontal transcendent reality as this objective dimension of the not yet latent in matter, as ‘this strongest element in reality, as an unfinished reality’ (Bloch 1995: 624). Philosophical realism, if it is to grasp horizontal transcendence, must become philosophical metaRealism. Via the emancipative transformation of nature achieved at the level of finite-teleologism coupled with the social emancipation heralded by socialism, humanity arrives at the position where it is liberated from ‘unfathomed necessity’ (Bloch 1995: 624) and can ‘consciously make history for the first time’ (Bloch 1995: 624). Here the intra-relationality of penultimate utopia is highlighted. Only under the socialist reconstruction of society when socio-economic causes of alienation are eliminated, when the interrelation of humanity ‘the most powerful thing alive’ (Bloch 1995: 624) has realised its concrete potential, ‘can a truly concrete mediation also begin with the most powerful thing that is not alive: with the forces of inorganic nature’ (Bloch 1995: 624). Once the wish-images of social utopia are realised<sup>8</sup> and the transformation of nature via technology is directed towards meeting human need rather than profit interests, then technological innovation ‘will have real utopia at heart again’ (Bloch 1995: 661). That the former is a prerequisite is demonstrated by Bloch’s analysis of technological development under capitalism. He notes the ‘de-organisation’ of technology characteristic of classical mechanics and ‘non-Euclidean technology’ (Bloch 1995: 664) where nature is treated progressively as an abstract, mechanised domain to be mastered and controlled and humankind is progressively more alienated from it.<sup>9</sup> He has in mind the revolutionary potential of sub-atomic physics that remains hopelessly abstract and dehumanised under the auspices of the capitalist profit motive, that is ‘within that component of the relation to nature which belongs to bourgeois ideology and thus shares the *abstractness (alieness) of the bourgeois material relation to nature*’ (Bloch 1995: 665 [emphasis in original]). Penultimate utopia will, by contrast, ‘manage atomic energies humanely … will mediate to itself this material … as one *without ultimate alienness*’ (Bloch 1995: 665 [emphasis in original]).

What Bloch is pointing towards here is the possibility of the emergence of qualitatively new forms of matter. It is in this context that he interprets Marx’s dream in *EPM* of humanising nature and naturalising humanity (Bloch 1995: 695). Sub-atomic physics is ‘the delivery and mediation of the creations slumbering in the womb of nature … the most concrete aspect of concrete utopia’ (Bloch 1995: 695). But this concrete technical utopia ‘presupposes interhuman concretizing, i.e. social revolution’ (Bloch 1995: 696). The intra-relationality of the social and technical dimensions of penultimate utopia cannot be overemphasised. But in terms of our discussion above regarding the extent of this intra-relationality (i.e. whether it is restricted to the human capacity to transform matter in the interests of the life process), Bloch quite clearly goes beyond even the ambitions of the strong Hegelian Marxists. He suggests that given the establishment of penultimate technical utopia, forms of creative labour emerge that were hitherto unimaginable, thereby opening up a qualitatively new phase in the history of the universe. That is, it seems that the goals of penultimate technical

utopia are exhausted by the satisfaction of the needs of the life process – labour activity has merely the transformative aspect that both Marx and Engels identified in the subject–object unity. As far as this goes, Bloch remains fully consistent with Marxism, albeit of the Hegelian variety. But this is by no means the limits of his utopian ambitions. He envisages humanity pushing on towards a still deeper level of utopian possibility – again present in the anticipatory consciousness – of ultimate utopia where a more fundamental unity is possible.

This deeper unity points to an objective creative urge within matter that itself presupposes the existence of a subject as the ultimate energising force of the universe. This vision of ultimate technical utopia has encouraged some to think Bloch pushes beyond not only Hegelian Marxism, but materialism itself (Schmidt 1973: 159; West 1991: 141–142). He hypothesises the existence of ‘the *nature-subject* ... the concept of a dynamic subject in nature ... the not yet manifested That-impulse (the most immanent material agent) in the real as a whole’ (Bloch 1995: 673 [emphasis in original]). Consider also the following passage:

Just as Marxism has discovered the really self-generating subject of history in working man, just as it only allows it to be discovered and to realise itself completely in socialist terms, so it is probable that Marxism will also advance in technology to the unknown, in itself not yet manifested subject of natural processes: mediating human beings with that subject, that subject with human beings, and itself with itself.

(Bloch 1995: 674)

The “That-impulse” is an imperceptible yearning that remains even in the midst of the successes achieved by penultimate utopia (ending of alienating social and economic relations, elimination of poverty and class exploitation, the blurring of the distinction between work and leisure, etc.). It is a yearning for a deeper level of unity between humankind and nature that remains unsatisfied and unrealised by the socialist transformation of society.

By invoking subjectivity in nature, Bloch is considerably more influenced by Schelling and Hegel than he is by Marx, because it is these panentheists who ‘cause the history of the manifestation of nature to land in *existing man*’ (Bloch 1995: 690 [emphasis in original]). We saw in [Chapter 4](#) how Schelling set the foundations of modern panentheism by dialecticising and historicising Spinoza’s Absolute Substance. A key aspect of this, it is recalled, was his desire to preserve the notion of finite self-determination that was threatened by Fichte’s Infinite Ego. The result was the Ego-Non-Ego unity of divine self-actualising essence. Nature and human history are accordingly regarded as manifestations of the development of freedom. Schelling posited relationality between human moral and divine self-determination, which requires the advent of human history to come to fruition and completion. For Schelling, God cannot be properly said to exist without this dialectical-historical development. His existence remains to be completed at some future date towards which the universe is progressing. It seems Bloch’s That-impulse in nature is, at the very least, a materialist

equivalent of this Schellingian principle when he says that '*finally manifested nature lies just the same as finally manifested history in the horizon of the future*' (Bloch 1995: 690 [emphasis in original]). The role of Schellingian relationality is emphasised in his contention that the more technical utopia can create the conditions for 'a technology of alliance mediated with the co-productivity of nature, the more certainly the creative forces of a frozen nature will be released' (Bloch 1995: 690).

It may seem that if Bloch's central ontological category – that reality is not yet, but is becoming – is Schellingian, this may call his claims to be a consistent materialist into some doubt. West even wonders if the darkness and emptiness of the not yet (i.e. its lack of actuality, which would bring it "into the light" so to speak) alludes to the pantheistic (or panentheistic) World Soul (or God) within matter that is its ultimate driving force (West 1991: 142). Bloch is calling on socialist humanity to enter into reciprocal relations with this That-impulse in order to bring it into actuality. But does this not presume the pre-existence of some foundational life-force beneath material reality? I do not think there is such a presumption for reasons I will go into in a moment. To be sure, there are some parallels with the Bhaskar of the "spiritual turn". One is especially reminded of the contrast between demi- and metaReality. Like Bloch, he is not convinced that satisfaction of the requirements of the life process exhausts the emancipative potential of human existence. The concept of demi-reality has some important similarities with penultimate utopia. As with Bloch, Bhaskar must transcend what he sees as the limitations of finite-teleological processes if the vision of Marx is to be fully realised. As we have seen in this chapter, this is nothing less than the transcendence of Marxian thought itself. Bloch envisages as part of the final actualisation of ultimate utopia the eclipse of humanity's "struggle" with nature where the latter is revealed at last to be our 'friend' (Bloch 1995: 695) evidenced by the emergence of qualitatively new forms of matter that enables humankind to transcend the externality of the natural world. This reminds me of the basis of Bhaskar's claim to have located the metaReal underlying materiality – the distinction between dialectical contradiction and dialectical connection. As we saw, the former is the domain (four-planar social being) of material transactions (struggles) not only within humanity, but between humanity and nature, which is parasitic upon the deeper transcendental ground-state where we can locate a fundamental unity (non-dual form of existence). Entity relationism supplants the tense relations of externality between humankind and nature that has placed limits on the emancipation that is possible once 3L totalised relations are secured. Once overcome, the underlying connectivity ("fine structure") of reality is revealed and harmonious relations emerge.

I suggested in [Chapter 4](#) that this move beyond the parameters of DCR had clear similarities with Hegelian ideas about the nature of finite reality. I think this is where Bhaskar and Bloch would part company because, unlike Schmidt and West, I think that the latter tries to remain a consistent materialist. The reason why I think Bhaskar moves closer to Hegel than Bloch is that he thinks that the base stratum is foundational. Bhaskar believes that demi-reality is emergent from

it, whereas Bloch insists that ultimate utopia has not yet come into existence. This strongly suggests that it is emergent from matter – a commitment that Bhaskar is unwilling to give. Bloch’s “ground-state” (although it is not strictly speaking a “ground” at all, but rather an emergent stratum) is unequivocally material. This pre-existence of nature as the prerequisite of entity relationism, fine structure and cosmic envelope is a condition that the Bhaskar of the spiritual turn would not necessarily want to endorse. I suggested in [Chapter 1](#) that there was scope for a reworking of key PMR categories that at least begins with a materialist outlook and I believe that Blochean process materialism and ultimate utopia provide for it. The philosophy of the not yet offers an important opportunity for those within CR who are uncomfortable with Bhaskar’s perceived departure from materialist thought to perhaps see some merit in PMR concepts after all (although given what I have said about the Marx–Bloch relation, it is unlikely that it will satisfy those who wish to remain true to fixed Marxian principles).

The origin of this departure goes back to both thinkers’ understanding of TR. Bloch’s idea of reality as “not yet” represents an innovative interpretation of what Bhaskar describes as transcendental depth realism. As we have seen, Bloch insists that the real is not brought into the “light” of the empirical or actual, because it remains a concrete “That-impulse” within matter and consciousness. For Bhaskar, however, that it is always there but not necessarily manifest was a feature of his original formulation of TR that he later applied to metaReality. Furthermore, describing the real in terms of the not yet places Bloch and Bhaskar on a divergent path on the issue of dialectics. The That-impulse of the real is experienced as a lack; the dark absence that is expressed in consciousness as a yearning that is not satisfied in the “lived moment” of everyday experiences or in matter as an unrealised potentiality. Matter exists in a state of tension between what it empirically is at any given moment and what it has the potential to become. On the other hand, the DCR concept of ontological negativity is a pre-existent (“really existing”) negativity. The latter is not a yearning or potentiality within the real, but is an already existent feature of things.

What is intransitive for Bloch is therefore contained in the not yet. The anticipation of ultimate utopia that is the darkness in the light of our consciousness of everyday experience is only possible because there is latent possibility within matter itself. The process whereby nature seeks its own adequate actualisation (“light”) is open. Humanity may yet choose to remain in darkness, but the way is open to a qualitatively new form of being that is waiting for us to unlock it. In the following passage, Bloch outlines the connection between the anticipatory consciousness and the objective real possibility. Once again he alludes to his own strongly utopian grasp of Marx’s interpretation of the creative subject in *EPM*: ‘Utopia of the end touches man in such objective, at the same time object-based astonishment.... At all stages here, this adequacy (the naturalisation of man, the humanisation of nature) is still open’ (Bloch 1995: 303). There are echoes of Schelling here once more in the notion that nature contains objective potentiality that can be delivered through the world-process or, as Bloch puts it, ‘matter is the real possibility for all the forms which are latent in its womb and

are delivered of it through process' (Bloch 1995: 235). In his atheistic treatment of Schelling, he is swimming in the currents of Left Aristotelian philosophy – from Avicenna to Giordano Bruno. He gives the world-process an unequivocal materialist foundation. Whereas Right Aristotelians (i.e. the Arab and Christian metaphysicians of the High Middle Ages) 'spread the wholly null void into a Premium before the world: God created the world out of the void' (Bloch 1995: 236):

...in pantheistic-materialist philosophers of the Middle Ages, for example in Avicenna, Averroës, Amalrich of Bena and David of Dinant, *real possibility becomes matter for the whole ground of the world*, and the divine creative will is *always a moment of matter ... creation appears – with omission of all dualism – solely as self-movement, self-fertilization of the matter of God*; this matter contains the potentiality and simultaneously that potency immanent in it which makes an extra-worldly mover superfluous. And this semi-materialism of real possibility increases in line with the Renaissance in Giordano Bruno.

(Bloch 1995: 236 [emphasis added])

The rejection of important aspects of Bhaskar's PMR and the outlines of an explicitly materialist (i.e. *horizontally* transcendent) alternative could hardly be more evident. We know from our earlier discussions that it would be inaccurate to identify in Bhaskar's ground-state any explicitly theistic commitment once the move is made from *FEW* to *RMR*. But we also saw that Bhaskar's PMR has close similarities with panentheistic ideas and so seems to be more compatible with the philosophical systems of Schelling and especially Hegel (as we have seen). PMR may not be theistic, but that does not mean it is protected from comparisons with panentheism. But Bloch appears to be presenting the case for a radical reworking of 'the whole ground of the world', which focuses more on the materialist pole of the 'pantheistic–materialist' and 'semi-materialism' of these key Left Aristotelian thinkers. From this emerges his radically open eschatology.

### **Not yet as unfinished being**

Despite this explicitly materialist foundation, it may still be possible to identify some difficulties for Bloch in relation to the connection between his utopian stages. If the possibility of ultimate utopia resides only in matter (i.e. there is no idealist "ground-state"), then is Bloch saying that it is a latent possibility from the beginning of time? If so, then the realisation of penultimate utopia – i.e. the satisfaction of the life process by the labour activity of Marx's transformative subject – is but the essential precondition for the realisation of ultimate utopia. Using Marxist terminology, penultimate utopia consists of the realisation of, first, the so-called "lower" phase and then the "higher" phase as outlined in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx [1875] 1977c). These are the two pre-conditions that must be met before the subject embarks on the task of completing

its historical role of going beyond transformative to truly creative subjectivity as we have defined it in this chapter. As West argues, however, ‘the whole chain of pre-conditions must depend ontologically on the real-possibility-for-utopia as the core of matter’ (West 1991: 160). If Bloch wishes to stress the connection between penultimate and ultimate utopia, then there must be something that is the ground of these historical stages. As we know, that something is the nature-subject, the That-impulse that is written into the very essence of matter.<sup>10</sup> On first appearance, this may look like Hegel’s World-Spirit. On the other hand, we know that Bloch was more influenced by Schelling’s cosmogenesis view of reality as starting from a state of primordial imperfection. Indeed, in his materialist appropriation, he posits a discontinuity between utopias and sees ultimate utopia as an entirely emergent stratum of Communist penultimate utopia. On this basis, we can say his eschatology is indeed radically open.

It seems to me that the latter position is closer to Bloch’s real intent. One only needs to look at his critique of Hegelian metaphysics in *PH*. We must remember that the key precondition of ultimate utopia is the emergence of a subject whose labour activity is truly *creative* of *qualitatively new* forms of matter. This strongly implies metaphysical productivity, rather than the realisation of a pre-existent or primordial potential within matter since the beginning of the universe. The latter position is characteristic of Hegel’s system and is also similar to Bhaskar’s cosmic envelope. But the central ontological category with which matter is defined – the not yet – means that it has not yet come into being. The future is ontologically radically open. Bloch’s unique (within Marxism) critique of Hegel’s subject panentheism is crucial here – for Bloch, Hegel’s “rational mysticism” meant that the logicism of Absolute Spirit presumed a unified structure of being and fixed teleological process (Hudson 1982: 79). The critique of Hegel’s system was not just that it was idealist, but that it was backward-looking – i.e. a *closed* processual metaphysics. Unlike every other Hegelian Marxist therefore, Bloch insisted that what was most valuable to Marxism was not just the dialectics of the creative subject and that this involved a cosmological process of being’s development, but one that was radically open rather than closed.

It seems that Schelling’s failure to adhere to TI and his tendency to embrace spurious infinity may have inadvertently rendered his methodology more attractive to Bloch’s materialist intent. Some commentators have indeed noticed that Bloch’s process philosophy of nature is more Schellingian than Hegelian (Geoghegan 1996: 159; Habermas 1983; Hudson 1982: 72–74; West 1991: 141). I think that they are correct and I have already noted the importance of Schelling’s concept of nature as experimental to radically open eschatology. But I think that the reasons for this debt can only really be appreciated in the context of our discussion in [Chapter 4](#) regarding the matter of Schelling and Hegel’s differing approaches to the Absolute. We will recall that for Hegel the divine Himself was subject to the unfolding of the dialectic, whereas Schelling was sure that He was not. The rational unfolding of the dialectic was an intrinsic part of the fundamental base stratum of Hegelian reality. This was the means

whereby Hegel could accuse Schelling of operating with a spurious concept of infinity. Absolute Being itself (or rather Himself) was processual. This dissolution of a fixed Absolute as the base stratum of being means that it is immeasurably more difficult to imagine the dialectics of matter in isolation from that of the Divine.

Hudson has commented that Bloch appropriated from Hegel's co-founder of modern panentheism 'model ideas and terminology with little regard for their meaning in Schelling's theological system' (Hudson 1982: 72). In this sense, Hegel is a victim of the logical robustness of his own system. TI makes it impossible to unwind the organic intra-connectivity that goes to the heart of the concept of finite self-transcendence. We must remember that despite the processual nature of Hegel's panentheistic concept of the base stratum, this does not prevent him from operating with a fixed teleologism and fixed future orientation. The unfolding of being in finite self-transcendence has as its ultimate criterion the quest for the realisation of freedom as self-determination. Remember that where Hegel goes beyond Schelling is by rendering God rationally knowable as self-determination. It is in this sense that Hegel's ontology is backward-looking – it has the presumption of a pre-existing conception of being as self-determination towards which history is progressing. We must remember that the consummation of nature by freedom is the basis of its non-duality and so is dependent on something transcendent (i.e. freedom) as the prerequisite for its very existence. Despite its logical robustness from the perspective of idealism, it was nevertheless an ontological constraint. There is no such materialist equivalent in Bloch's metaphysic of Hope. Perhaps the best thing we can say about Schelling's failure to adhere to TI is that it meant he could at least develop an open eschatology of *matter and nature* where the crucial role of human action meant that material being was imperfect, contingent and reliant on human action, free from the fixed teleologism of TI. By distinguishing God as Absolute Essence from His dialectical self-manifestation in history and nature, Schelling's cosmogenesis of matter could be considered independently from his theology. All of this Bloch gratefully appropriated for his philosophy of Hope without regard for their originally theological purpose in Schelling's system. What Bloch ended up with was the principle of disavowing any notion of a fixed Absolute, which he owed to Hegelian finite self-transcendence, and the principle of experimental matter, which he owed to Schelling. For all of these reasons, there is little credence in West's suggestion that there may be anything more than mere echoes of a pantheistic (or panentheistic) World Soul in the not yet.

### **Bloch's post-secularism: concrete utopia as “quasi-religious”**

Given the emphasis Bloch places on the materialist pole in his Left Aristotelianism, the remaining question worth asking is where we can place him in relation to the metaphysically ambitious post-secularism we have been exploring throughout this project. In short, the non-existence of an “other-worldly” dimension to reality is not any reason to dispense with transcendence. The dismissal of

transcendence that we have seen with the later Feuerbach and Marx is not justified under the terms of the not yet, because the world itself is a process that is full of immanent references to a beyond (Hudson 1982: 99). Bloch replaces the *vertical* transcendence of theistic and panentheistic idealism with *horizontal* transcendence. If theism and panentheism embrace *immanence-within-transcendence*, then Bloch's process metaphysics embraces *transcendence-within-immanence*.

The issue of Bloch's relation to Feuerbach and Marx is an interesting one in this regard, because it is not as straightforward as a simple disagreement as to the role of transcendence. I have suggested that the later Feuerbach and the mature Marx are not meta-post-secularists, because of their unwillingness to accept transcendence. But this does not mean that Bloch's much more positive appraisal of religion is not influenced by some key insights that these two philosophers have made on the issue of religious belief. Evidence in support of *transcendence-within-immanence* is found in the utopian content of religion. In what follows, I argue that Bloch's ability to locate such content is due in no small measure to Feuerbach and Marx's analyses of religion.

Bloch took a deep interest in the possible concrete utopian thrust that it contained. This is evident in the free use he made of religious symbolism from his earlier pre-Marxist works, such as *The Spirit of Utopia* and *Thomas Münzer as Theologian of Revolution* (1921). As Vincent Geoghegan has noted, although Bloch later claimed to be an atheist at this time and there is no question of any incompatibility of these free-flowing religious sentiments with his later critique of mystical transcendence, 'it is as if in this early work he is trying to allow religion to express its subversive utopian core, spontaneously and unaided' (Geoghegan 1996: 80). His criticism of the metaphysical truth claims of theism should not be construed as an affirmation of Enlightenment secularism or PDM. On the contrary, the suppression of what he identified as biblical humanism was an unfortunate feature of the Enlightenment move against the ignorance and tyranny of institutional Christianity, which Bloch thinks draws on the most conservative strands of the text, as we will see in a moment. At the core of Bloch's analysis of the religious and secular lies a deep concern with the hyper-rationalism of the Enlightenment. Like Charles Taylor, he is unconvinced by its acultural pretensions. The alternative encultured view of the evolution of the secular age developed by expressionism enables Bloch to locate important ethical categories that characterise Enlightenment morality in the scriptures of Judeo-Christianity. Bloch chastises the Enlightenment for failing to locate the liberating, radical and revolutionary thrust of the Judeo-Christian tradition and failing to understand how biblical imagery was an important resource in social and political struggles against tyranny.

To be sure, Bloch was heavily influenced by Enlightenment attacks on theistic metaphysical arguments for the existence of God. This is the basis of his critique of mystical transcendence. He also recognised modernity's liberating potential against ignorant and oppressive ideologies. He even acknowledged its importance in exposing biblical sources of such oppression. But he completely

rejected the presentation of the Enlightenment and Judeo-Christianity as binary opposites. He did not buy into the idea that the former was the application of disinterested rationality to the cause of human liberation and welfare against the obstructive ignorance, tyranny and irrational superstition of the latter. He would have stoutly rejected Sam Harris' contention that the positive aspects of religion were due to moderating influences from external, essentially secularising, forces. Rather, explorations of the scriptures revealed a liberating utopian urge within humanity. The trouble with the Enlightenment, as Bloch saw it, was not so much that it encouraged philosophical immanence, but that it crudely equated the oppressive tendencies (of especially the Catholic Church) with relatively unproblematic appropriations of biblical sources. Rather, as he tells us in *AC*, 'it was the Church that gave the world the widest-reaching instrument of cruelty; and the Church is the institution least founded on enlightenment' (Bloch 1972: 20). Bloch laments the twisting of the scriptures to serve the interests of the rich and powerful (Bloch 1972: 19). Indeed, the Enlightenment would benefit greatly in its endeavours if it distinguished the tyrannical church from the liberating threads intrinsic to the Bible:

There is only this point, that Church and Bible are not one and the same. The Bible has always been the Church's bad conscience.... The Enlightenment ... will be all the more radical when it does not pour equal scorn on the Bible's all-pervading, healthy insight into man. It is for this very reason ... that the Bible can speak to all men, and be understood across so many lands and right on through the ages.

(Bloch 1972: 21)

This does not, of course, mean that he is ignorant of, or offers an alternative explanation for, conservative trends within scripture that have been unproblematically appropriated for tyrannical purposes. And so it is not just that many passages from the Bible are vulnerable to "twisted" interpretation in the service of conservatism. Bloch identifies textual evidence of intrinsic Biblical contradictions, which can reflect conflicting principles and interests and the duality between the distant, wrathful and backward-looking creator of Genesis and the much more merciful and forward-looking God of Exodus (Geoghegan 1996: 84–85). The Yahweh of Genesis is said to be reminiscent of the Ancient Greek gods – the despotic, wrathful and 'blood-drinking Yahweh' (Bloch 1972: 90), whose punishment for Adam and Eve is disproportionate to their crime (Bloch 1972: 90), who favours Abel's blood offering to Cain's one of the fruit of the earth and who demands that Abraham sacrifice his son only to settle on 'the even less guilty and utterly defenceless ram' (Bloch 1972: 91). This is the 'old Yahweh-figure, full ... of back-slidings into oriental despotism' (Bloch 1972: 92). In this context, Bloch praises those who encourage rebellion against such tyranny and injustice; even the serpent's claim that wishing to be like God is not much of a sin. He contends: 'is not knowledge of good and evil the very same as becoming a man?... The serpent ... has light in its eyes, instead of hollow

submissive slave-guilt' (Bloch 1972: 86). And yet Yahweh is also capable of mercy in His withdrawal of the curse He places on Cain, the refusal of Abraham's sacrifice and Amos' conception of Yahweh as a God who eschews burnt offerings (Bloch 1972: 91). This is evidence of a transformative God of process and becoming, a God who is future-oriented with '*Futurum* as the true mode-of-being' (Bloch 1972: 92). This Yahweh comes to fruition as the God in Exodus who leads His people out of tyranny 'into the land of freedom' (Bloch 1972: 93). The God of Exodus designates a God of change, development and hope, 'the Exodus-light, away from Pharaoh ... a God who is himself not yet what he is: who *is* only in the future of his promise-to-be' (Bloch 1972: 95). He guides the Israelites in their escape from oppression on the long journey to a future promised land. It is this deity that enables Bloch to uncover biblical sources for the most promising and enriching humanism that captures the possibilities of a utopian future for the species where poverty, oppression and ignorance have been eliminated.

In this way, the Bible becomes a vital resource in the construction of his concept of the anticipatory consciousness and so is an indispensable part of his Open System metaphysics. This interrogation of the scriptures for their concrete utopianism is the foundation of Bloch's post-secularism. This connection between religious and anticipatory consciousness is made clear when we come to appreciate that the fundamental feature of the latter is what Bloch calls 'inconspicuous everyday mysticism' (Bloch 1995: 295). These are moments of beauty that are constant features of everyday life, which contain tantalising glimpses of the not yet. But following Hegel, the greatest indications of something better towards which the world is progressing can be found not in mundane experiences, but in art, philosophy and especially religion. All three contain wish-images of horizontal transcendence of the most exquisite kind.

Accordingly, if Judeo-Christianity can be stripped of its "other-worldliness" and sublated into the concrete utopia of the not yet, its truth content can be fully realised. The centrality of human praxis to the processes of experimental matter is contained within particularly the Christian conception of the God-man. The positive pole of the appraisal of Christianity undertaken by that 'so very important atheist' (Bloch 1995: 1286) Feuerbach where man brings his idealisations of himself back down to Earth is emphasised here (Bloch 1995: 1284). The species concept of EOC seems to have deeply impressed Bloch, who located its meta-utopian potential.<sup>11</sup> Any discussion of the origins of the materialist interpretation of the creative subject and hence meta-utopia cannot take place without acknowledgement of Feuerbach at this stage of his thought. With the passing of theistic metaphysics, 'God as creator of the world disappears completely, but a gigantic creative region of man is gained, into which ... the divine as a hypostatized human wishful image of the highest order is incorporated' (Bloch 1995: 1284–1285). The infinity of the species concept is crucial here to Bloch's meta-utopian intent, since he links it explicitly to the anticipatory consciousness (Bloch 1995: 1287). He is also alive, however, to the Marxian criticisms concerning the abstractness of the concept in its Feuerbachian formulation: only as

transformative praxis can the utopian content of the concept be fully appreciated (Bloch 1995: 1285). But we must bear in mind – if we are to remain consistent with our earlier discussions of the Feuerbach–Marx relation in its totality – that the price Feuerbach then pays in his later naturalist eschewal of the species concept is the abandonment of any possible meta-utopian interpretation, just as we have seen with the mature Marx. The Blochean critique of *EOC* is, when coupled with his dubious transcendental grasp of historical materialism, capable of producing the meta-utopia of the creative subject. It seems that a similar critique of *LOER/EOR* from a Marxist viewpoint also goes beyond the immanent utopia of the transformative subject and onto meta-utopia. In Bloch's brief treatment of the later works, there are suggestions of a strong dissatisfaction with the idea of nature's permanent externality and our relations of dependence on it. He appears to think, contra my analysis, that Feuerbach retains the species concept in *LOER/EOR* when he says that

not only the *subject*, the demand for the return of all the abundance transferred to the gods, must be understood as utopian, but also the *nature* which surrounds it; it must certainly not appear as completed, like Feuerbach's mechanical-materialist nature.

(Bloch 1995: 1285 [emphasis in original])

We have seen, however, that going beyond the fixed materialism of Feuerbach in the manner of Marx and Engels is a recipe only for the Darwinian–Marxian transformative subject of immanent utopia.

Nevertheless the species concept conceived in terms of the processual being of the not yet ensures that the place of honour in the utopian project is reserved for religion. It is the site of the conflict between the unfulfilled lived experiences of the moment and man's not yet being captured in the anticipatory consciousness' protests against human misery and injustice in all its forms. It is the infinite species concept that issues 'warnings against every shallow secularisation of religion' (Bloch 1995: 1288). This includes the vulgar and rather perfunctory dismissal of religion by the radical Enlightenment that has been echoed in strands of Marxism. And when the infinity of this concept is grasped as incomplete human being (i.e. as the processual activity of the creative subject), religion 'becomes conscience of the final utopian function in toto: this is human venturing beyond itself ... *the act of transcending without any heavenly transcendence but with an understanding of it: as a hypostatized anticipation of being-for-itself*' (Bloch 1995: 1288 [emphasis in original]). The mysteries of God are actually insights into the mysteries of the human condition that are yet to be understood. This reaches its fullest expression in the God-man of Christianity, which is accordingly 'the unknown anthropos, the anthropos arising from unknownness' (Bloch 1995: 1289). The role of Bloch's creative subject in the qualitative transformation of not just humanity but nature is located in Christian hope, since 'Christian hope was that everything should be man redeemed, including transfigured nature' (Bloch 1995: 1289). In short,

Christianity is the epitome of the anticipatory utopian ideal: ‘God thus appears as the *hypostatized ideal of the human essence which has not yet become in reality*’ (Bloch 1995: 1289 [emphasis in original]). By linking religion in general and Christianity in particular to the creative subject’s construction of an unknown world, its centrality to the transition from penultimate to ultimate utopia can be fully appreciated. Conversely, that humanity retains the option of not proceeding to this unknown is equally expressed in Christian images of hell. Hell defined as living for all eternity without the light of God has its atheistic correlative in Bloch’s own vision of damnation – living forever without hope of the coming of the truly human. Christianity as hope expressed in its liberation theology that stands in stark contrast to its impoverished conservative strands opens up possibilities for a dialogue with ideologies from the Left. Indeed, in his later years, Bloch called for precisely just such a dialogue with Marxism.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the possibility of developing a theory of metaReality from the resources of Feuerbachian and Marxian materialism. I have argued that such an attempt founders, because the dialecticisation and historicisation of the later Feuerbach’s anthropological sensualism by Marx and Engels under the terms of their historical materialism rests on transformative rather than creative subjectivity. This constrains them to operate within a broadly Darwinian philosophy of humanity and nature where the former is an emergent stratum of the latter, which remains an ever present external force over which humans have only minimal control. As a result, there is no scope for trans-humanist metaphysic within Marxian thought. At best we can identify the presence of immanent utopia where Hope is restricted to the emancipative goals of traditional socialist politics. There is no mystical “beyond” with which the concrete present is pregnant and towards which we are progressing. The social ontology of Lukács’ is the closest Hegelian Marxism can get to utopia, but it most certainly is not of the transcendent kind. Whatever post-secular credentials these thinkers might have, they clearly are not meta-post-secularists.

It is precisely on this issue that Ernst Bloch stands out, because he was a Hegelian Marxist who made every effort to reconcile historical materialism with transcendence. The distinction between the merely transformative and the creative Subject – between immanent and meta-utopian visions – is expressed in the bridge between penultimate and ultimate utopias. The world-constituting subject becomes truly creative once traditional socialist political objectives have been realised and humanity sets its sights on metaReality. Whatever merit there might be in these visions, the gulf between utopias is not one that can be bridged by Marxism alone. To be fair to Bloch, he is aware that Marxism can suffer from a utopian deficit, but seems to think that this is restricted to the “cold stream” of vulgar economic determinism with its “iron laws”. He chastises the so-called “orthodox Marxism” of Karl Kautsky and other Second Internationalists and

even the economism of the late Marx himself (West 1991: 35). He chose to swim instead in the currents of the “warm stream” grounded in Marx’s youthful humanism, which, as we saw, reached its zenith in *EPM*. But even in these warmer waters there is only scope for immanent utopia at best. To sustain the infinite-teleologism of ultimate utopia Bloch must construct ontological categories that owe more to Hegel and Schelling than Marx and Engels. This is not to dispute his materialist credentials, as some commentators have wished to do. His process metaphysics do not rest on any idealist premises. It is for this reason that I think he may even move towards an innovative vision of what I tentatively call *post-materialist metaReality* – one that may not have even occurred to Bhaskar. This is the metaReal not grasped as a cosmic envelope, but as an emergent property of nature, as nature’s self-movement towards largely unknown versions of itself. It is transcendence to be sure, but horizontal and emergent from immanence, rather than vertical and foundational. These are visions that are grounded in the concrete possibilities of the material present and the wish-images of religion. Bloch may not be a consistent Marxist, but perhaps his deficiencies in this regard say more about the failures of Marxism to come to terms with the utopian longings of the human condition most starkly captured in its historical hostility to religion. Even immanent utopia is unlikely to provide much room for religion, but if Hegelian Marxism can acknowledge this as a deficiency in its thinking, then perhaps Bloch’s greatest wish as an old man – that Marxism and Christianity finally embark on a meaningful dialogue, rather than dismiss each other as dangerous and troublesome opponents – may yet be realised.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For this reason, I cannot agree with Alfred Schmidt’s contention that Feuerbach simply replaced Hegel’s Absolute Spirit with a material “World Substance”, thereby committing him to ‘an equally metaphysical principle’ (Schmidt 1973: 27). As I argued in the last chapter, the eclipse of the species concept was the decisive blow to metaphysics within the Feuerbachian system. It seems that Schmidt is repeating the typical error in much of the literature on Feuerbach of ignoring the importance of the post-Hegelian period of his thought.
- <sup>2</sup> I am not suggesting that Lukács anywhere thinks that Communism would succeed in abolishing necessary labour of this sort. What I am suggesting is that once one dissolves nature’s externality, what remains is a subject-object identity that allows for qualitatively new forms of matter. This must be so under the terms of the strong Hegelian position – the humanity–nature relation is defined as the latter’s attempt to transcend its own externality. As we will see when we look at Bloch – who had a radical interpretation of this strong Hegelian Marxism – it is not difficult to imagine qualitatively new types of labour activity, including the abolition of necessary labour as the key realisation of this act of the transcendence of mere mechanism and compulsion to meet physical need.
- <sup>3</sup> Schmidt has noted a shift in position from the early to the mature Marx on this ontological issue. In *EPM*, under the influence of the Feuerbach of *EOC*, there is more evidence of an acceptance of the creative view of labour ‘as a process of progressive humanisation of nature, a process which coincided with the naturalisation of man’

(Schmidt 1973: 76–77). (I note once again my earlier criticism of Schmidt's failure to distinguish between the early and later Feuerbach on this issue.) The subject-object dialectic is here grasped in more straightforwardly Hegelian terms of the quest to abolish the externality of nature. But by the time of *DK*, this objective has been abandoned in Marx's mind. Labour activity can, rather, merely transform its relation with nature, since any 'attempt to form the stuff of nature must take heed of the regularities proper to matter' (Schmidt 1973: 76–77).

- 4 There has been a tendency in much of the Marxist literature to place too much focus on all of the implications that this anti-metaphysical position has for Marx's view of human nature. We will see in a moment when we look at the labour theory of culture that this does indeed involve the denial of a fixed human essence. But if we focus exclusively on this issue, we are more likely to make confusing statements about the emancipative potential that labour activity has. Geoff Boucher, for example, has noted Marx's rejection of metaphysics, but seems to imply that its implications are exhausted by a rejection of a universal human nature (Boucher 2012: 20). This leads him to misunderstand the crucial differences we have noted in Marx's concept of free, creative human labour in *EPM* from those of 1846 onwards. Noting the crucial fact that human labour is unique by virtue of the fact that it involves consciousness, Boucher seems to think this is enough to eliminate the element of compulsion (i.e. unconscious labour): 'The human being, Marx went on to claim, is a "universal animal" who, because it is conscious, can imitate the transformations of nature performed by any other animal and, indeed, can imaginatively transcend the instinct-driven "work" of the animal kingdom' (Boucher 2012: 19). This, it seems to me, is an interpretation that is over-reliant on *EPM* phase of Marx's work, which we have already noted is heavily influenced by the Feuerbach of *EOC*. From a historical materialist perspective, by contrast, universal labour is contained within the finite-teleology of nature's self-movement, which we have already noted retains within it the moment of necessary compulsive labour.
- 5 In *The Extended Phenotype* (1981), Dawkins amends his definition of the meme slightly. In *The Selfish Gene*, memes referred to the consequences for human society of the operation of cultural replicators, such as the examples just given. But this seems to be more analogous to phenotypes (i.e. the physical manifestations of the organism that result from genetic sets of instructions), rather than to genes themselves (which are just the genetic instructions). The meme should simply be regarded as the unit of information (the tendency to believe in an afterlife) that has memetic effects (such as the persistent attraction of religion).
- 6 As Woolfson observes: 'Appreciation of environment, knowledge of the seasons, observed regularity in the habits of prey, an understanding and selection of materials and the processes of manufacture of tools to serve different purposes, all that became the field for the successive expansion of increasingly human action as mankind sought to bring both the external world of nature and its own activity under conscious control' (Woolfson 1982: 8).
- 7 Leakey and Lewin (1993: 164), quoted from Creaven (2000: 52–53).
- 8 This voluntarist role in Marx's theory of revolution is seen in a letter written to Arnold Ruge in September 1843, especially the following passage: 'Hence, our motto must be: reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analysing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality' (Marx 2002). In this passage, Marx is said to reflect on the human capacity for creative engagements with matter in a way that embodies will in objectivity.
- 9 In particular, he talks about the departure from the "organic model" in modern bourgeois technology – that is, the extent to which capitalist inventions resemble less and less the parts of the human organism. From

imitating parts of the body ... the hammer the fist, the chisel the nail, the saw the row of teeth and so on ... the technology which has developed in the past century [1850–1950] shows less and less resemblance to human limbs and proportions  
(Bloch 1995: 661–662)

– a process Bloch laments as ‘de-organisation’ (Bloch 1995: 662). Mechanisation, the discovery of the electron and proton invited humans to view nature itself as mechanised, ‘an *unnaturalistic occurrence*, a kind of *unnatural physics*’ (Bloch 1995: 662 [emphasis in original]). Classical mechanics treats nature abstractly, as something alien to be conquered and consumed. With the dawn of the atomic age, this process is exacerbated (Bloch 1995: 665).

- 10 Although there is an absence of an explicit acknowledgement in any of Bloch writings, it seems that this concept of nature–subject is the product of the influence of Catholic speculative philosopher Jakob Frohschammer, who developed the idea of nature containing an “objective imagination”. Bloch admitted the connection shortly before his death (Hudson 1982: 71).
- 11 This is, of course, in keeping with my own division of Feuerbach into meta-utopian and immanent utopian stages of his intellectual development in the last chapter.

# Conclusion

## Post-materialist metaReality

Having considered the rich and complex formulations of immanence and transcendence in the Hegelian tradition, we are now in a position to draw some important conclusions from our discussions. In this last chapter, I want to trace the outlines of an argument that defends metaphysical approaches to post-secularism, utopia and reality. I agree with so much of what the meta-utopians and metaRealists in this book have to say. But I depart from Hegel, Bloch, Bhaskar and others by postulating this metaphysical dimension to reality as not a foundational stratum of existence, nor a futurist category of Hope latent within matter itself. Rather, it is a future contingent state of post-material existence that is brought into being by human activity. In this I will utilise Hegel's concept of the divine as finite self-*transcendence* and humanity as *finite* self-transcendence, Feuerbach's materialist concept of the infinite species potential of humanity and Marx's theory of praxis to imagine a future state of existence whereby, through our productive material activity, we realise our seemingly infinite potential to actively create new forms of existence, both for ourselves and for nature. This is quite a claim and many (perhaps even most) readers will be immediately sceptical of such an ambition. But I think it is no more ambitious than much of what we have seen in this book. In fact, it is less ambitious than Hegel's Absolute Spirit, Bhaskar's "cosmic envelope" and "ground-state" and even Bloch's ontology of Hope.

### Can there be a post-materialist basis for metaReality?

If Bhaskar goes beyond historical materialism, then Bloch at least remains true to a broad materialist framework. But he, too, dispenses with key historical materialist principles. Using the language of CR, Bloch's departure from Marx and Engels signifies his dissatisfaction with the restrictions on emancipative theorising that immanent utopia and post-secularism represents. We have seen how DEN posits the emancipative finite teleology of the transformative subject and I have argued that this operates within the Darwinian–Marxian ontology of humankind's place within, and dependence on, ultimately external nature. DEN would therefore be seen as inadequate, because it fails to see how Hope is an ontological category. As we have seen in the last chapter, the main point of

departure of Bloch from Bhaskar is on the issue of how the transcendent dimension comes into existence. They are agreed that existing materiality is not completed reality. For Bloch it is not yet and for Bhaskar it is demi-real. But this difference is more than an issue of the use of language. It reveals that they come to embrace transcendence, meta-utopia and meta-post-secularism from differing philosophical perspectives. Bloch thinks that incomplete reality is not yet, because it is yet to be; it is an *emergent stratum of matter*. Whereas Bhaskar thinks it is the cosmic envelope allowing human beings to reconnect with their ground-state. Non-duality and its products – solidarity, non-alienating relations of fraternity between human beings and creative freedom – are part of the ontology of Hope and so is futurist for Bloch, while it is constitutive of all reality for Bhaskar. In short, Bloch's Open System metaphysics is the attempt to embrace transcendence and non-duality from within what critical realists would call SEPM.

I want to suggest that an explicitly materialist approach to metaReality is epistemologically robust. We have explored at length in [Chapter 5](#) some of the errors and weaknesses of Hegelian answers to core philosophical questions about the nature of being and reality. Feuerbach's critique, despite his failure to grasp Absolute Idealism panentheistically, was a powerful exercise in exposing the shortcomings of idealism. I argued in [Chapter 6](#) how Bloch's futurism owed a great deal to Feuerbach's transcendental humanism of EOC. But I also believe that where he goes beyond the latter – by positing infinite species potential as not yet – is where he adapts some key categories of the panentheistic system for materialist purposes. We saw in [Chapter 4](#) how Jakob Böhme combined definitions of God as Maximal Being (positive) with definitions of Him as No-Thing (negation of being). The result was a dialectical compatibilist view of God as processual Being – He contained within Himself the infinite potential and freedom to Be. There is a sense here that we should consider God as not yet in existence, but via coming to know Himself through His creation he comes *into* existence. This is not to say that Böhme (or indeed Hegel, who was greatly impressed by this dialecticisation of God) thought that God was an emergent stratum of matter – we know that for panentheists the universe only exists so as to enable the ideal foundational substratum to develop itself. In Bloch's materialist transformation of process dialectics, he is also positing Being as futurist. Ultimate utopia is the site of the creation and emergence of qualitatively new forms of being and existence energised by ontological Hope. We have seen that an important example of this is the appearance of new forms of humanity (trans-humans). It is in this sense that humans become what Bhaskar would describe as “godlike”. From this we can deduce that the Blochean system permits a state of matter's development where it becomes conceivable to speak of (in this case human) beings who exhibit characteristics that religion has traditionally labelled divine. Such thoughts are speculative to be sure, but in the age where science and technology seem to offer unlimited possibilities for the future direction of humankind that are at present difficult to imagine, it is surely not inappropriate to think in these terms. Bloch himself published *PH* at the dawn of the nuclear

age and seriously believed that it could signify the emergence of a qualitatively new dimension to material reality with unimaginable consequences for the improvement of the human condition. We saw that this was the evidence of the existence of Hope in nature when ‘the Not-Yet-Become dawns in the world’ (Bloch 1995: 623), the process of infinite-teleologism in nature brought to completion by human activity designed to emancipate itself.

Sub-atomic technology already seemed to be evidence of humankind venturing into a qualitatively new form of nature for Bloch. Technologies from the bourgeois industrial age, as we saw,<sup>1</sup> resemble less and less parts of the human organism and become more abstract and mechanised in a process that is fully realised in sub-atomic physics. Bloch laments this, but his main gripe seems to be that it has been conceived and developed by capitalist ‘non-Euclidean technology’ (Bloch 1995: 664). As we saw, he immediately posits the potential for penultimate utopia to harness this technology for “humane” goals; a society ‘which will mediate to itself this material … as one *without ultimate alienness*’ (Bloch 1995: 665 [emphasis in original]). One can hypothesise with considerable justification that under a socialist reconstruction of society, this force of nature – discovered and domesticated by humankind for humankind – might enable us to transcend the satisfaction of the desires and needs dictated by the life process symbolised in the ‘organic model’ (Bloch 1995: 661) where technology mimics the organic technology of the human body (hammers like fists, chisels like teeth, etc.). Bloch has little compunction about imagining such prospects when he speaks of the transformations of nature that sub-atomic physics promises. The sub-atomic forces that are the ultimate creative forces of life in the universe have been directed towards the destruction of the world under capitalism (the system credited with the invention of nuclear weapons), but can be redirected ‘for peaceful purposes’ (Bloch 1995: 663) under socialism:

Just as the chain reactions on the sun bring us heat, light and life, so atomic energy, in a different machinery from that of the bomb, in the blue atmosphere of peace, creates fertile land out of the desert, and spring out of ice. A few hundred pounds of uranium and thorium would be enough to make the Sahara and Gobi desert disappear, and to transform Siberia and Northern Canada, Greenland and the Antarctic into a riviera. . . . Together with all this the de-organisation of technology, of one which is no longer Euclidean, would be complete to its remotest extent; *it would project from our mesocosmic world into an immeasurably different one*, not just into a sub-atomic, but also a macrocosmic.

(Bloch 1995: 665 [emphasis added])

Of course, Bloch was living at a time when the threat that nuclear energy poses to the environment was not fully appreciated. He died nine years before the Chernobyl disaster, for example. Had he been aware of these limitations, he might at least have tempered such utopian sentiments and effusions about the potential for the nuclear age. But the promises for the future offered by what he

calls *technological utopias* may also be extended to cover staggering progress in other areas of science, especially in medicine. It does not take too much of a leap of imagination to ask if technological utopia in some far off future age is to include the emancipation from disease, hunger and ultimately even mortality in the same way as social utopia emancipates us from man-made conditions of suffering. Just as social utopia offers the possibility of the realisation of new forms of morality and virtue that religious belief normally reserves for the divine, so technological utopia offers us a glimpse of transformed human biological circumstances and possibility even a transformation of the human condition itself. In this sense, some of the properties we normally attribute to God do not exist – *yet*. The logic of Bloch's argument is that God does not exist, because matter is the foundational stratum of reality. But He may yet come into existence as the result of the intra-relation of socialised forms of praxis with nature's own Hope content. God comes to Be not because He comes to completion through the created universe, but rather because He comes into existence through the objective Hope embedded in the universe that pre-exists Him.

### **MetaReality as radically emergent panentheism**

Before some readers balk at such a far-fetched suggestion, it might be worth considering two things. First, to say that God is not yet in existence is by no means foreign to theological discourse. In fact, panentheists have been considering such a possibility for some time. Indeed, it is not such a difficult thing to do, especially when examining Böhme's and Hegel's suggestions of a dialectically unfolding God. I have in mind what we might call *radically emergent panentheism*. This view of God draws upon the growing body of evidence in the sciences that material reality is fundamentally emergentist. Arthur Peacocke, for example, argues that the foundations of modern panentheism are grounded in the hierarchical structure of nature – emergent strata existentially dependent on, but irreducible to, the lower levels from which they emerge – that science is increasingly presenting to us (Peacocke 2004: 138). Emergentism is interpreted as evidence of God's immanence in nature and nature's containment within God, who nevertheless transcends it. There is what in the language of DCR we would call 3L – that is, the totalities of interrelated strata. It is possible to hypothesise that these totalities form parts of a wider totality to form a hierarchy of emergent strata that is the universal totality of all being known as "Godself". It is in this sense that the universe is seen as internal to God. For Peacocke, this provides a compelling account of an omniscient God's relation to His creation that is preferable to classical theism's account. The "external" God of the latter tradition must intervene separately at the various discreet levels. But if 'God incorporates both the individual systems and the total system of systems within Godself, as in the panentheistic model, then it is more conceivable that God could interact with all the complex systems at their own holistic levels' (Peacocke 2004: 149–150). And at the apex of this natural hierarchy stands human personhood, 'the complex of the human-brain-in-the-human-body-in-society' (Peacocke 2004: 150). The

irreducibility of this stratum allows us to in a sense transcend our physical bodies, while at the same time remaining immanent within them.

Philip Clayton makes the crucial point that personhood is a qualitatively different emergent stratum that has important implications for panentheism. As we move up the hierarchy, what we mean by something being “in” or “internal” to a lower stratum changes. What we mean by saying atoms are “in” molecules, molecules “in” cells, cells “in” organisms, etc. is rather different to what we mean when we say intentions are “in” or internal to brain activity. Intentionality and agency are dependent on the brain, but are qualitatively distinct from it (Clayton 2004: 89). The level of “the mental” is a qualitatively higher stratum than anything lower down, presumably because it is not a physical stratum. The mind contains properties so radically different from what it has emerged from that it has been an extremely difficult task for neuroscientists to link them.

Personal agency and intentionality is a powerful analogy to God’s own relation to the world in terms of His agency. God is immanent and acts within all of the world’s structures and processes in the same way that human persons are immanent and act within their own physical bodies. Neither God nor human persons are reducible to, but transcend, the physical. Radical emergentist panentheism is simply the radicalisation of this analogy by dispensing with the idea that God contains within Himself a primordial ideal essence as the base stratum of reality. He thus becomes entirely an emergent property of materiality – the ultimate apex of evolutionary processes, just like human personhood. Hegelian panentheism is, of course, idealistic and so cannot adhere to this radical application of panentheism. But it does seem to involve a conception of God in terms of the divine Subject in dialectical relations with nature. Is it not possible to suppose that in imagining God in this way Hegel is speaking analogously about the highest level of emergence known – i.e. the human mind and personhood? There are obvious limitations in drawing such an analogy, not least because of the problems already noted in neuroscience in linking brain activity to human consciousness. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that it might be the best starting point we have in considering the place of transcendence and immanence in our world. There might be some merit in considering it as a powerful contribution to questions about metaReality. As Clayton argues: ‘isn’t it appropriate to take the highest level of emergence one can find and apply it, limitations and all, as a model for the divine nature?’ (Clayton 2004: 84) MetaReality becomes a new and utterly unique stratum – a quality that the universe acquires over billions of years of matter’s development and evolution. Moreover, it provides a model for explaining metaReality’s relation with that from which it has emerged or, as Clayton puts it,

emerging spirituality is imagined to feed back onto the world the way mental phenomena affect physical states in the world. God does not exist in any literal sense, but there may be an increasing ‘deification’ of the universe over time.

(Clayton 2004: 90)

This is, in a sense, to view God as, temporally at least, finite as He is in the process of coming-to-be as matter becomes increasingly complex. It is not the process of the world functioning so as God can come to realise Himself. Rather, it is the process of the world becoming itself godlike.<sup>2</sup> Divine properties become the attributes not of some Absolute Spirit or Ground of Being (if we were to utilise Bhaskar's PMR for idealist purposes), but of the universe itself in the process of its unfolding.

### **Radical emergentist panentheism and contingency in nature**

Second, I am not suggesting that a transcendent omnipotent, omniscient and perfect cosmic super-subject could emerge as the result of human social and technological progress. What I am suggesting is that key characteristics of humankind that Bhaskar describes as "godlike" and some others that he does not are realisable not as part of some pre-existent "cosmic envelope", but as emergent forms of human material existence.

In [Chapter 5](#), we saw Feuerbach criticise TI as an anthropomorphic imposition of the structure of human thought onto reality. Some readers may also wonder if the basis of Bloch's futurism that I seem to be endorsing here might also be subject to such criticism. To posit Hope as an ontological category does seem rather anthropomorphic. We saw in [Chapter 6](#) that we could speak of objective Hope, because of nature's "That-impulse" and that Bloch was influenced by Schelling's idea that God's existence depended on dialectical-historical development. But I also argued that where he departed from Schelling's closed process metaphysics was by positing this impulse as radically open and even contingent. It does not have to be satisfied and, indeed, may never be. There is a world of difference between imagining a future state of existence that developments within humankind's interactions with nature makes possible and positing that state of existence as foundational or somehow pre-existing matter. Let us not forget that Hope exists as an ontological category only in the sense that we can identify potential and possibilities for the future in the empirical present. It is not some life-force that would allow us to think of the universe as "creation" in the same way as idealists, as though matter only comes into existence for the purpose of realising "Hope". Hope is, rather, part of matter's *self-movement*.

We might even go further than this and invoke Feuerbach's concept of anthropocentric transcendence in *EOC* where rationality is not posited as part of some wider cosmological process, but rather directed exclusively to the system of species' needs. We saw that this allowed Feuerbach to qualify as a trans-humanist. It is in the infinite species potential of his concept of humanity, rather than in matter itself, where we might locate the "That-impulse" with its radical openness and contingency. In order for this to work, we would obviously need to dispense with the abstractness of Feuerbach's own conception and combine the concept with Marxian praxis, although obviously divested of Marx's rejection of trans-humanism. The result would be a theory of humankind where we can

imagine a future state of human existence not limited to forever operating subject to Darwinian laws of nature. But this is only possible as the result of our interaction with an external material universe that in itself does not contain any “impulse” or “futurist” orientation. Rather, it is a quality or property that the universe acquires through the evolution of humankind (and, in principle, other species elsewhere in the universe are capable of the same agentive activity). We go beyond Marx and Engels by conceiving of praxis as the means whereby we transcend the limitations of our stage of natural evolution (become trans-human), rather than simply the means whereby we can maximise our survival chances. MetaReality is anthropic only in the sense that it is a trans-human product created with species’ needs in mind. But the new form of being that results is irreducible to those species’ needs. Indeed, we could then agree with Bloch that socialism is more than just the means of securing the goals of penultimate (or immanent) utopia and is about metaReality after all. To be sure, it is not something that is imposed onto nature in the way that the instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment imagined. We have not rejected the narrow rationality of CM and PDM just to return to it under the guise of metaReality and meta-utopia. It is, rather, a *contingent* phenomenon of nature – humankind – that is creating a new stratum of matter in harmony *with* nature. In a sense, we are participating in matter’s self-movement, but it is a contingent self-movement: there is no need to invoke Hope as a pre-ordained or extra-human ontological category. Thus the eschewal of metaReality conceived of by Feuerbach and Marx helps us to restrain the ambitions of Bloch’s “That-impulse” by defining Hope in anthropocentric terms. It still counts as metaReal, because the result of our anthropocentric activity has the ontological implications that Bloch identified that thus transcend such activity. We are speaking, as I said above, of the creation of new strata of Being that is qualitatively different from that from which has emerged. This uniqueness may be the basis of our ability at some future date to transcend the limitations of the laws that restrain our species’ needs. But there is nothing pre-ordained or necessary about the process. Hope is just the creation of beings intelligent enough to bring it into existence. It is in this sense alone that we could agree with Bhaskar that we are “godlike”. But we do so not perhaps in the way he intended because by exploring our potential as a species, we become the *creators* of new and higher aspects of reality. God does not exist. But if we imagine ourselves as capable of activities previously attributed to God or Absolute Spirit or “life-force” or some mysterious foundational stratum of all reality, then it might be possible to say that God may yet exist. He is a future state of existence where new and transcendent forms of being become possible. The old Left Hegelian vision of God as an expression of the deepest human hopes and self-images might have some truth in it after all. It is in this sense that Bloch may have been correct when he said that technological utopias are the same as social utopias, indeed ‘they are intertwined with them, in so far as they push back the barriers of nature and fashion a world for us’ (Bloch 1995: 623). Bloch, as we have just seen, was impressed at the potential for human creativity heralded by the dawn of the nuclear age. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientific director of

America's Manhattan Project during the Second World War, famously said of the destructive capacity that this technology placed in human hands that he had acquired the power to destroy our planet. In the post-nuclear age, where there are exciting and seemingly endless new possibilities for the future direction of the world across a whole range of disciplines – scientific and non-scientific – it might not be so outlandish to claim that we may find a way to direct our talents towards peaceful ends. We may yet become the creator of worlds.

## Notes

1 See [Chapter 6](#), endnote 9.

2 See also *The Re-emergence of Emergence* (Clayton and Davies 2008).

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